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# The Decline of the ‘Syrian Effect’ in Turkish-Israeli Relations

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## ABSTRACT

Historically, Syria has played a central role in the formation, development and even deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. Given this, it is not surprising that the rapprochement between the two countries started with another development, the bloody civil war, in Syria. Yet, despite the continuing conflicts in Syria and the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel have not improved as desired. This article will analyze why the “Syrian effect,” unlike in former periods, failed to provide the desired and required cooperation between Turkey and Israel during the Syrian civil war.

**Keywords:** Syrian Civil War, Turkish-Israeli Relations, the Syrian Effect, Multiple-level analysis

## Türk– İsrail İlişkilerinde ‘Suriye Etkisi’nin Düşüşü

### ÖZET

Tarihsel olarak, Türkiye-İsrail ilişkilerinin oluşmasında, gelişmesinde ve hatta bozulmasında Suriye önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bu husus dikkate alındığında, ikili ilişkilerin yumuşama döneminin Suriye’de meydana gelen bir başka gelişmeyle, 2011 yılında patlayan kanlı iç savaşla, başlaması şaşırtıcı değildir. Fakat, Suriye’de çatışmaların devam etmesine ve Irak ve Suriye İslam Devleti’nin doğmasına rağmen, Türkiye ve İsrail arasındaki ilişkiler arzu edilen seviyeye çıkamamıştır. Bu makale “Suriye etkisi”nin, daha önceki dönemlere kıyasla, Suriye İç Savaşı boyunca neden Türkiye ve İsrail arasında arzulanan ve gerekli iş birliğini sağlamakta başarısız olduğunu analiz edecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriye İç Savaşı, Türkiye-İsrail İlişkileri, Suriye Etkisi, Çok-aşamalı analiz

Historically, Syria has played a central role in the formation, development and even deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. In fact, Turkish-Israeli diplomatic relations began in the 1950s partly as a result of Israel's desire to use Turkey's shared borders with multiple Arab countries. From Turkish territory, Israel could collect information about Syria, and Iraq, in an attempt to balance these countries' power in the Middle East. After Turkey's many years of neglecting, Ankara and Tel Aviv formed a strategic alliance in the 1990s as both countries were threatened by the Syrian regime. With a new government in Turkey and changing geopolitical conditions in the 2000s, Ankara developed warm relations with Syria and attempted to broker a peace deal between Damascus and Tel Aviv, which failed after Israel's 'Operation Cast Lead' in Gaza at the end of 2008. Disappointed by Israel's action, Ankara felt betrayed and this event led into a series of political crises between Turkey and Israel which reached a zenith with the *Mavi Marmara* raid in May 2010. All in all, as Stern and Ross point out, "developments in or associated with Syria have proved instrumental in determining Israeli-Turkish relations, for better or worse."<sup>1</sup>

Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that the rapprochement between these two countries started with another development in Syria: the bloody civil war that erupted in March 2011. With the spread of chaos and anarchy in Syria, Israel and Turkey reluctantly, and with the mediation of then U.S. President Barack Obama, decided to solve the crisis through the bilateral relations. As Netanyahu apologized to Turkey for the *Mavi Marmara* raid in March 2013, he reasoned this decision with the developments in Syria. "The fact that the Syrian crisis is constantly intensifying was a prime consideration," he wrote on Facebook after the apology. "It's important that Turkey and Israel...are able to communicate with each other and this is also relevant to other regional challenges."<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite the continuing conflicts in Syria and the emergence of a new threat, namely the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), by December 2018 bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel had not improved as much as the level of threat in the region required. This article will analyze why the "Syrian effect," compared to former periods, failed to provide the desired and required cooperation between Turkey and Israel during the Syrian civil war.

As Schmidt states, a foreign policy theory "seeks to explain why a particular state pursued a specific policy at a certain point of time."<sup>3</sup> Foreign policy researchers, especially those involved in statistics, may seek to find a magic variable that explains most, if not all, foreign policy decisions in international politics. This may be a fruitful attempt in political science if the researcher examines a multiple number of cases over an extended period of time. Yet, if the researcher examines a specific case in a particular time period, as in this study, relying on a single variable may not offer a sound explanation as it would ignore the complexity of international relations in which local, national, regional, and global developments interact with each other. Taking this into consideration, this study will rely on a multidimensional explanatory methodology and show the effect of Syria on Turkish-Israeli relations by highlighting the interactions of systemic, international, and the domestic variables instead of focusing on a single variable or a certain theoretical perspective.

1 Moran Stern and Dennis Ross, "The Role of Syria in Israeli-Turkish Relations", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.14, No.2, 2013, p.115.

2 Attila Somfalvi, "Netanyahu Says Syria was Main Reason for Apology", *Ynet News*, 23 March 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4360212,00.html> (Accessed on 18 August 2017).

3 Brian Schmidt, "Theories of US Foreign Policy", Michael Cox and Doug Stokes (Eds.), *US Foreign Policy, Second Edition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, p.8.

The article continues as follows. First, I will present a brief history of the Syria effect on Turkish-Israeli relations. Following this, I will explain contemporary developments and demonstrate the real and potential effects of the Syrian civil war on the bilateral ties between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Then I will identify the systemic, international and domestic factors that restrain the close cooperation between these two countries in this turbulent period of the regional politics. Finally, I will summarize the findings in the concluding chapter.

## **The 'Syrian Effect' in Turkish-Israeli Relations**

Turkey is the first majority-Muslim-populated country that recognized Israel as an independent state on March 28, 1949. The national security interests have become the major determining factor in their bilateral relations. Most of the time, Syria was another actor in the region that shaped these interests. In the early years of the political relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv, it was primarily Israeli security interests that pushed the country into seeking close cooperation with the Menderes government of Turkey. Even before the formation of a secret alliance between two countries in 1958, Israelis appreciated Turkey's critical geopolitical importance as the latter's long borders with Iraq and Syria, could provide important intelligence insights about these two countries that were officially at war with Israel. And this is why Israel appointed an experienced diplomat, Eliyahu Sasson, as a minister to the Ankara legation in 1949. During his service in the early 1950s, Ankara turned into a 'Middle East listening post' as Israeli officials in Turkey established important contacts with Arab informants and messengers, especially with Syrians who "were willing to trade information on developments in their own countries" in return for fulfillment of some personal interests.<sup>4</sup> In this period, despite Ankara's discontent, Israeli officials in Ankara were also involved in clandestine activities, including an aborted coup attempt in Syria.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1950s, the same Syrian threat led Turkey to positively respond to the Israeli demand for cooperation. In 1957, Turkey came to the verge of war with Syria after Damascus signed an economic and technical aid agreement with the Soviet Union on August 6 and communist-leaning General Afif Al-Bizri became the Syrian Chief of Army Staff eleven days later. In response to these developments with its southern neighbor, Turkey moved her troops to the Syrian border which naturally brought Soviet and American involvement due to the Cold War dynamics.<sup>6</sup> While the war was averted as the two great powers mediated the crisis, it gave the Israelis an opportunity to form a partnership with Turkey. In an Israeli Foreign Ministry meeting on September 11, when the Turkish-Syrian crisis was not resolved yet, Reuven Shiloah, the first director of Mossad, recommended improving relations with Turkey as he believed that the common Syrian threat might open the way to rapprochement between Turkey and Israel.<sup>7</sup> Shiloah was right in his evaluation as Turkey and Israel formed a secret alliance called the 'Phantom Pact' in August 1958. Among other things, one of the factors that

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4 Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean*, Totowa, Frank Cass, 1987, p.8.

5 Ibid., p.10.

6 Melek Fırat and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler", Baskın Oran (Ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olaylar, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Volume I: 1919-1980*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p.630-631.

7 Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p.35.

hastened the process was the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Syria and Egypt in February of that year.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Syria played a critical role in the formation of a Turkish-Israeli alliance.<sup>9</sup>

As the security threats Turkey facing eroded with the military coup in Syria that brought the end of the UAR in 1961. Ankara's Middle East policy relied on a balance between its relations with Israel and the other Arab countries. During the Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, Turkey remained militarily neutral while politically leaning towards the Arab countries. Turkey's financial troubles, political interests (the growing number of Arab states which would be decisive in the UN votes over the Cyprus issues) and domestic sympathies with the Palestinians were critical factors behind this policy. After the Phantom Pact, Turkey treated Israel as "its mistress," as David Ben-Gurion once reportedly said: being in a relationship but refraining from publicly acknowledging it.<sup>10</sup>

Once more it was Syria that changed the substance of Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1990s. Although Syria lost its great patron with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the same development also made Damascus more unrestrained in its foreign policy. Syrian disagreements with Israel over the Golan Heights and with Turkey over water rights on the Euphrates River brought a significant tension in this period. As a result of these political problems, Syria maintained close relations with Iran and Iraq while becoming the main supporter of *Hizballah* against Israel and the PKK against Turkey. These policies led Turkish decision-makers to see Israel as a security partner again. Indeed, during the 1995-1996 Israeli-Syrian peace process, Ankara followed the negotiations with the suspicion that, if successful, the Israeli-Syrian peace might be detrimental to its national security as it would lead Syria to be more aggressive against Turkey. The failure of negotiations not only satisfied Turkey, but also made a Turkish-Israeli partnership more necessary to counter the common Syrian threat.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Ankara and Tel Aviv entered into a military alliance that included arms sales, intelligence sharing, common military training programs, and exchanges of cadets.<sup>12</sup> Although there were a number of other reasons behind the Turkish-Israeli alliance –Turkey's need for arms in its fight against the PKK or Israeli concerns about Iran, etc.– deterring Syria was the shared interest for Israel and Turkey. Syria believed the same as then Syrian Defense Minister General Mustafa Tlas stated on a number of occasions that the main objective of Turkish-Israeli military cooperation was to put pressure on Syria.<sup>13</sup>

8 Ibid. p.37.

9 According to Firat and Kürkçüoğlu, domestic factors played a decisive role in Turkey's belligerent strategies against Syria. They point out that Turkey went through significant economic problems in this period and, in order to divert public attention away from the internal problems as well as to receive more economic aid from the United States, the Menderes government attempted to use the Syria card. Firat and Kürkçüoğlu, "Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler", p.631-632. Although domestic factors were important in determining Turkey's Middle East policies not only in this period but in general, one cannot neglect the role of Syria in Turkish-Israeli cooperation as Shiloah's statement underlines. Indeed, domestic – economic or political -factors played a more important role in the intensity of Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1990s when Israel had close ties with the United States. Yet, American-Israeli relations in the 1950s were not as developed as in the post-1967 era, therefore, it is difficult to argue that Turkey improved its relations with Israel as a result of economic/domestic factors.

10 Dan Arbell, "The U.S.-Turkey-Israel Triangle", *Brookings*, Analysis Paper, No.34, 2014, p.5-6, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/USTurkeyIsrael-TriangleFINAL.pdf> (Accessed on 22 August 2017).

11 Ayşegül Sever, "Turkey and the Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks in the 1990s", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol.5, No.3, 2001, p.89-93.

12 Çağrı Erhan and Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, "İsrail'le İlişkiler", Baskın Oran (Ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olaylar, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Volume II: 1980-2001*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002, p.571.

13 Türel Yılmaz, *Türkiye-İsrail Yakınlaşması*, Ankara, İmaj Yayıncılık, 2001, p.70.

Not only did the Syrian effect play a role in the formation of a Turkish-Israeli alliance in the 1950s and its development in the 1990s, but the same effect was also visible in the deterioration of bilateral relations in the late 2000s, but this time more indirectly. After the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power in November 2002, Ankara gradually shifted its security-oriented foreign policy to cooperative and multi-dimensional foreign policy under the banner of 'zero problems with neighbors'. In this respect, Turkey attempted to solve its long-term foreign policy problems with its neighbors including Greece, Armenia and Syria. In the first days of 2004, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited Ankara, the first time a Syrian president had visited Turkey since Syrian independence in 1946, and stated that both countries have "moved together from an atmosphere of distrust to one of trust."<sup>14</sup> In the same year, Erdoğan visited Damascus while refusing an invitation to visit Israel from then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He also turned down a meeting with then Israeli Labor and Trade Minister Ehud Olmert because of violence during the Second *Intifada*.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Erdoğan did not intend to break ties with Israel; instead, Ankara wanted to raise its status by playing a mediator role in regional conflicts, including the one between Syria and Israel. In May 2008, Israeli and Syrian officials confirmed they were engaged in indirect peace talks under Turkish auspices.<sup>16</sup> Yet, this process ended with Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in December. Two days before the operation, Ehud Olmert, then Israeli Prime Minister, was in Ankara for the peace talks with Syrians, yet he did not mind to inform Erdoğan that the operation was pending. Both this lack of trust and the failure of Erdoğan's mediation effort deeply embarrassed the Turkish prime minister.<sup>17</sup> Despite his sensitivity on the Palestinian issue, as Özcan points out, Erdoğan's "criticism noticeably focused on how his counterpart Ehud Olmert deliberately wrecked his mediation scheme for the Israeli-Syrian proximity talks."<sup>18</sup> A month later Erdoğan publicly reprimanded then Israeli President Shimon Peres at Davos by stating, "When it comes to killing, you know well how to kill."<sup>19</sup> Davos was followed by a series of successive minor crises,<sup>20</sup> and the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla raid, which resulted with the deaths of ten Turkish citizens by Israeli security forces, in May 2010. This final crisis completely froze the political relations between Turkey and Israel. Although the Syrian effect was not the determining factor in all of these events, it still played an indirect role in the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations.

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14 "Syrian President Makes Landmark Turkey Trip", CNN, 6 January 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/01/06/turkey.syria.reut/index.html> (Accessed on 22 August 2017).

15 Sami Moubayed, "Turkish-Syrian Relations: The Erdoğan Legacy", SETA, Policy Brief, No.25, 2008, p.3, [http://setad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SETA\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_No\\_25\\_Sami\\_Moubayed.pdf](http://setad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SETA_Policy_Brief_No_25_Sami_Moubayed.pdf) (Accessed on 22 August 2017).

16 Peter Walker, "Syria and Israel Officially Confirm Peace Talks", *The Guardian*, 21 May 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/21/israelandthepalestinians.syria> (Accessed on 22 August 2017).

17 Steven A. Cook and Bernard Gwertzman, "Gaza and Strains in Israeli-Turkish Relations", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 January 2010, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/gaza-and-strains-israeli-turkish-relations> (Accessed on 22 August 2017).

18 Gencer Özcan, "The JDP's Changing Discursive Strategies towards Israel: Rhetoric vs. Reality", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol.15, No.57, 2018, p.22-23.

19 Katrin Bennhold, "Leaders of Turkey and Israel Clash at Davos Panel", *The New York Times*, 29 January 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/30/world/europe/30clash.html> (Accessed on 8 September 2017).

20 Yigal Schleifer, "Why Israel Humiliated Turkey in Response to a TV Show", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 January 2010, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/2010/0112/Why-Israel-humiliated-Turkey-in-response-to-a-TV-show> (Accessed on 8 September 2017).

## Syrian Civil War and Its Influence on Turkish-Israeli Relations

Taking the historical ‘Syrian effect’ into consideration, it is natural to expect that the dynamics of Turkish-Israeli relations would change again after the Syrian people took to the streets against the Assad regime in March 2011. Although the initial Syrian policy of Erdoğan government was to convince Bashar Al-Assad to make political and social reforms,<sup>21</sup> it soon became clear that Damascus had no tendency to listen these recommendations. Disappointed by the failure to solve a crisis right across its borders and seeing a chance to increase its regional status, Ankara decided to take a more aggressive stance against the Syrian regime,<sup>22</sup> which brought Turkey and Israel closer in their feelings against Assad. Nevertheless, Ankara and Tel Aviv did not see any urgency to resolve their political disagreements as both expected a short crisis in Syria which would end with the fall of Assad regime.<sup>23</sup>

The expectations were not realized when Al-Assad did not follow the examples of Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak or Tunisia’s Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and refused to step down in response to the public protests. With the help of Russia and Iran, the Syrian regime relied on military force, which brought chaos and anarchy in Syria. The ongoing crisis put Turkish and Israeli national interests at significant risk as Turkey faced a massive refugee flow and increasing Kurdish power around its southern border while Israel worried about the security situation around the Golan Heights and growing Iranian influence in Syria. The presence of radical terrorist groups and freely-circulating chemical weapons in the warzone were also mutual security concerns for Ankara and Tel Aviv. As a result, and with U.S. mediation, Erdoğan and Netanyahu took the first step toward rapprochement in March 2013 when Netanyahu apologized to Erdoğan for the death of Turkish citizens in the *Mavi Marmara* raid.

As mentioned, Netanyahu reasoned away the apology with the developments in Syria whereas Erdoğan stated his expectation that the conciliation with Israel would hasten the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>24</sup> The Syrian effect seemed to be working in shaping Turkish-Israeli relations once again. However, the developments after the March 2013 phone call show that the Syrian effect was far from creating the impact it did in the 1950s and 1990s. Although the developments in Syria became more threatening for both Israel and Turkey – the emergence of ISIS as a new and influential actor in regional politics, growing autonomous power of the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Northern Syria, the rising Iranian influence in the country, etc. – over time, agreeing on a

21 Ian Black, “Turkey Tells Bashar al-Assad to Cease Syria Repression”, *The Guardian*, 23 June 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/23/syria-bashar-al-assad-turkey-refugees> (Accessed on 8 September 2017).

22 Sebnem Arsu, “Turkish Premier Urges Assad to Quit in Syria”, *The New York Times*, 22 November 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/world/middleeast/turkish-leader-says-syrian-president-should-quit.html?mcubz=3> (Accessed on 8 September 2017).

23 Joel Greenberg, “Israeli Officials Say Syria’s Assad is Doomed”, *The Washington Post*, 14 December 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/israeli-officials-say-assad-is-doomed/2011/12/14/gIQAYBuEuO\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.f2b79b9f4c40](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/israeli-officials-say-assad-is-doomed/2011/12/14/gIQAYBuEuO_story.html?utm_term=.f2b79b9f4c40) (Accessed on 9 September 2017); “Davutoğlu Esad’a Ömür Bıçtı”, *NTV*, 24 August 2012, [http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez\\_e7zmEO7uzSO9Pv6hw](http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez_e7zmEO7uzSO9Pv6hw) (Accessed on 9 September 2017).

24 Barak Ravid, “Turkish PM Erdogan: Conciliation with Israel Could Hasten Assad’s Fall”, *Haaretz*, 23 March 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/turkish-pm-erdogan-conciliation-with-israel-could-hasten-assad-s-fall-premium-1.511491> (Accessed on 9 September 2013).

reconciliation deal took more than three years after the phone call<sup>25</sup> and the result was nothing but a 'cold peace' between Ankara and Tel Aviv.<sup>26</sup>

On the Israeli side, the end of hostilities did not ease the mistrust towards Erdoğan's Turkey. The Israeli cabinet meeting held to discuss the reconciliation deal took more than four hours, was an in-depth session with the angry exchanges, and although the agreement was approved, three influential ministers – Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Education Minister Naftali Bennett and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked – voted against it.<sup>27</sup> After the approval of the reconciliation agreement and exchange of ambassadors, some Israeli politicians – within and outside the government – were still sure that in the short term Turkish-Israeli relations would be nothing like before 2008 and kept making negative statements about the Turkish government. For example, in a meeting with European diplomats in November 2016, Lieberman made lengthy remarks about the purges and state of emergency in Turkey after the military coup attempt in July 15, and urged the Europeans to adopt a tougher policy toward Turkey in response to Turkey's post-coup measures.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Moshe Ya'alon, former Israeli defense minister during the rapprochement period – 2013-2016, claimed that along with Iran, Erdogan's Turkey is one of the radical elements seeking hegemony in the Middle East<sup>29</sup> and warned the Europeans that the Turkish president is 'deliberately Islamicizing' Europe by funding mosques and Islamic cultural centers in Europe in order to establish hegemony there as well.<sup>30</sup> Military officers, who supported the rapprochement deal, were also pessimistic about the future of Turkish-Israeli relations. In a closed conference at Tel Aviv University in November 2016, Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevi, the Military Intelligence Directorate of the Israeli Defense Forces, warned that Israel must be cautious in its relations with Turkey because of a "process of religious extremism" under Erdoğan's rule.<sup>31</sup>

Looking at the Turkish side does not offer a more positive picture. Although the level of criticism towards Israel seemed to diminish after the rapprochement deal, Turkish officials – again within and outside the government – occasionally voiced their disappointment over Israeli policy in Palestine. For example, after the Israeli government considered banning the use of loudspeakers to issue prayer calls in May 2017, Erdoğan criticized Israel for being 'racist' and 'discriminatory' and called for the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Against this criticism, Israel issued a strong response and called on Turkey to mind its own human rights records before criticizing

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25 Donald Macintyre, "Israel and Turkey End Six-Year Standoff", *The Guardian*, 27 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/26/israel-and-turkey-to-announce-end-of-six-year-stand-off> (Accessed on 10 September 2017).

26 Barçın Yinanç, "Turkey's Cold Peace With Israel", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28 June 2016, <http://www.hurriyetsdailynews.com/turkeys-cold-peace-with-israel.aspx?pageID=449&nID=100983&NewsCatID=412> (Accessed on 10 September 2017).

27 Barak Ravid, "Israeli Security Cabinet Approves Turkey Reconciliation Agreement", *Haaretz*, 29 June 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.727780> (Accessed on 10 September 2017).

28 Barak Ravid, "Israeli Defense Minister Urges Europe to 'Learn From Putin' When Dealing with Erdogan", *Haaretz*, 29 November 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.755887> (Accessed on 11 September 2017).

29 "Ya'alon: Erdogan Seeking to be 'Neo-Ottoman Empire'", *Israel National News*, 15 March 2017, [www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/226750](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/226750) (Accessed on 11 September 2017).

30 Raphael Ahren, "Ex-Defense Chief: Erdogan is 'Deliberately Islamicizing' Europe in Bid for World Domination", *The Times of Israel*, 6 June 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/an-ex-defense-chief-sees-europe-deliberately-islamized-at-turkeys-hand/> (Accessed on 11 September 2017).

31 "Military Intelligence Head Warns of Instability in West Bank, Possible Wave of Terror", *The Times of Israel*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/military-intelligence-head-warns-of-instability-in-west-bank-possible-wave-of-terror/> (Accessed on 11 September 2017).



Israel.<sup>32</sup> During the al-Aqsa Mosque protests two months later – after the Israeli government introduced new security measures in response to the death of two police officers in the compound – the Turkish president this time accused the Israeli government of ‘harming Jerusalem’s Islamic character’ and stated that Ankara would not “remain silent against the double standards in Jerusalem.” In response to Erdoğan’s words, Israel issued a statement that, for the first time, accused Turkey of occupying Northern Cyprus while Emmanuel Nahshon, Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman, gave a harsher response by stating, “the days of the Ottoman Empire have passed.”<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the rapprochement deal did not change the Turkish public’s negative views of Israel as one poll shows that more than a third (37.4%) of Turks believe that Israel poses a threat to Turkey although there is no common border between the two states and no military conflict in the past.<sup>34</sup>

Despite some calls, especially in the Israeli press, for common Turkish-Israeli strategy against the Iranian presence in Syria,<sup>35</sup> domestic and international developments in 2018 made cooperation less likely. The Trump administration’s announcement to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in December 2017 and the following violent clashes in the holy city as well as in Gaza pushed Erdoğan to adopt an anti-Israeli rhetoric again. Additionally, Israel’s criticism of Turkish military operations in northern Syria made him link the issues of Syria and Palestine. After an Israeli attack caused the death of seventeen Palestinians at the Gaza border in late-March, Erdoğan accused Israel of an ‘inhumane attack’ and asked, “Have you heard any noteworthy objections to the massacre by Israel that happened yesterday in Gaza from those who criticize the Afrin operation?” When Netanyahu called Erdoğan’s remarks as ‘April Fools’ Day’ joke, the Turkish president called him ‘terrorist’ and Israel a ‘terrorist state.’<sup>36</sup>

As the date of changing the location of the embassy move – May 14, Israel’s Day of Independence - got closer and Turkey headed toward general elections on June 24, the hostile discourse intensified. In May, Erdogan criticized Israeli airstrikes on Syria and blamed Israel for attacking the sovereignty of Syria and ‘sowing fear’ in the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> During this period, Israeli officials remained silent probably because all Turkish political parties adopted an anti-Israeli discourse in the pre-election period.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, when Erdoğan criticized Israel over a new law granting only Jews the right of

32 Ralph Ellis and Andrew Carey, “Erdogan Slams Treatment of Palestinians; Israel Issues Angry Response”, *CNN*, 9 May 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/08/middleeast/erdogan-muslim-visits-jerusalem/index.html> (Accessed on 12 September 2017).

33 Tuvan Gumrukcu and Ece Toksabay, “Turkey’s Erdogan Says Israel Damaging Jerusalem’s ‘Islamic Character’”, *Reuters*, 26 July 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-turkey/turkeys-erdogan-says-israel-damaging-jerusalem-islamic-character-idUSKBN1AB1WD> (Accessed on 12 September 2017).

34 Kadir Has Üniversitesi, “Türk Dış Politikası Kamuoyu Algıları Araştırması”, Türkiye Çalışmaları Merkezi, Temmuz 2017, [http://www.khas.edu.tr/w243/files/TDP-Sunum\\_vfinal.pptx](http://www.khas.edu.tr/w243/files/TDP-Sunum_vfinal.pptx) (Accessed on 13 September 2017).

35 Nimrod Goren, “Time for an Israel-Turkey Dialogue on Syria”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 March 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Time-for-an-Israel-Turkey-dialogue-on-Syria-547362> (Accessed on 6 August 2018).

36 Herb Keinon, “Erdogan: You are a Terrorist, Netanyahu: You are a Butcher”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 April 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Netanyahu-Ankaras-idea-of-an-April-Fools-Joke-is-to-preach-morality-to-the-IDF-547628> (Accessed on 6 August 2018).

37 “‘You Are a Terror State’: Erdogan Says Israel Pushing Region into War”, *Sputnik News*, 13 May 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201805131064418760-erdogan-israel-terror-state/> (Accessed on 6 August 2018).

38 It is interesting that an article in *Haaretz* argued that Erdoğan could be ‘Israel’s best bet’ in the elections as Turkish opposition parties were more critical on Israel than Erdoğan and it was the AKP who voted down a bill which proposed cancelling all previous agreements with Israel, including the reconciliation deal, and severing economic ties. Davide Lerner, “In Turkish Elections, Erdogan Could Well Be Israel’s Best Bet”, *Haaretz*, 22 June 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-in-turkish-elections-erdogan-could-well-be-israel-s-best-bet-1.6194694> (Accessed 6

self-determination in the country and called it a 'racist' and 'fascist' state in July, Netanyahu ridiculed him by stating that they will take Erdogan's criticism as a 'compliment' by a 'great democrat' and accused the Turkish president of "massacring the Syrians and the Kurds and jailing thousands of his own people."<sup>39</sup> From these accounts, it is clear that Syria is turning into a part of the hostile discourse between Ankara and Tel Aviv rather than being a factor that provides rapprochement and a return to good relations.

## **The Decline of the Syrian Effect**

Although the Syrian effect led Turkey and Israel to overcome some of the most serious crises in their common past, it is clear that this effect could not continue to succeed in forming close relations between the two sides. The decline of the Syrian effect cannot be understood by analyzing only one country – Turkey, Israel or Syria – or a single variable – the Kurdish threat, Iranian nuclear program, or ideological characteristics of Turkish and Israeli leaders. One cannot also rely on a single level of analysis – local, national or global – to have a clear picture. A multidimensional explanatory methodology focusing on the interaction of different variables is the key to understanding the decline of the Syrian effect.

As a starting point, one first needs to look at the change in the meaning of the Syrian threat. In the past, the Syrian threat referred to the policies of the central Syrian government against Turkish and Israeli national security interests. Syrian alliances with the Soviet Union and Iran or its support for the PKK and Hezbollah were decided by the Syrian officials in Damascus. Today, on the other hand, the Syrian threat mainly refers to the dangers emanating from the anarchical situation and lack of government control in that country. The growing Kurdish autonomy in northern Syria, the presence of radical terrorist organizations, and the movement of chemical weapons are taking place in a Hobbesian world as the Assad government's priority has been to survive over the last seven and a half years, not to control the developments within Syria's borders.<sup>40</sup>

The lack of government control in Syria has resulted in the multiplication of actors in that country. The Syrian civil war is not simply a conflict between a government and the people, instead it

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August 2018). Yet, this development is not unordinary. As Özcan argues, under AKP governments there has always been a difference between discourse and actions towards Israel as despite an anti-Israeli rhetoric, the AKP leadership generally aimed to control the effects of crises with Israel and maintained some aspects of the relations, especially economic ties. Özcan, "The JDP's Changing Discursive Strategies towards Israel".

39 "Israel's Netanyahu Accuses Erdogan of 'Massacring Syrians and Kurds'", *Reuters*, 24 July 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-turkey-netanyahu/israels-netanyahu-accuses-erdogan-of-massacring-syrians-and-kurds-idUSKBN1KE192> (Accessed 6 August 2018).

40 As a result, although Turkish and Israeli officials have no love for Assad, in some occasions they voiced their preference for Assad's rule over other scenarios. For example, in 2013 Maj. Gen. (Res) Amos Gilad stated that the Syrian leader acted sensibly in his policies towards Israel and he was in full control of the weapons, therefore Israeli security interests are met better with him than without. Another Israeli official agreed with him by stating, "Better the devil we know than the demons we can only imagine if Syria falls into chaos and the extremists from across the Arab world gain a foothold there." See, "Israel Prefers Bashar Assad to Islamist Rebels", *The Times of Israel*, 18 May 2013, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-prefers-assad-to-islamist-rebels/> (Accessed on 14 September 2017). Due to their strong criticism against Assad in the past, Turkish officials are not inclined to voice a possible preference change but some analysts argue that Ankara "would be happy to shake hands with Assad and crush the PKK together with Syria." See, Thomas Seibert, "Concerned over Kurds, Turkey Moves Closer to Iran and Possibly to Assad", *The Arab Weekly*, 27 August 2017, <http://www.theArabweekly.com/Cover-Stories/9138/Concerned-over-Kurds%2C-Turkey-moves-closer-to-Iran-and-possibly-to-Assad> (Accessed on 14 September 2017).

has turned into an arena that will be critical in the future regional balance of power. The global power struggle between the United States and Russia and the regional competition between Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel are taking place in Syria and this power competition is one of the reasons why the Syrian civil war is still ongoing. The local actors such as the Kurds, the Sunni groups, the Shia forces, and radical Sunni elements that each also want their own seat on the table. This multiplication of actors eventually changes the meaning of the Syrian threat for each actor directly or indirectly participating in the power competition.

For Ankara and Tel Aviv some threats are mutual. They are both concerned with the radical terrorist organizations, especially ISIS, and the free movement of chemical weapons that may fall into the hands of terrorists. From Ankara's perspective, the main threat coming out of Syria is a growing Kurdish autonomy around its southern borders. The main Kurdish force in the area is the PYD's armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG), which is considered by Ankara to be a terrorist organization. The Western countries, especially the United States, on the other hand, view the YPG as "the most successful anti-IS ground force in Syria" and for this reason do not recognize it as a terrorist organization.<sup>41</sup> This situation not only leads to problems between Ankara and the West, but the growing legitimacy of the YPG also makes it the most serious 'Syrian threat' in terms of Turkish national security interests.

Traditionally, Israel has taken Ankara's side regarding the Kurdish issue and Tel Aviv has given significant political and economic support to Turkey during its fight against PKK terrorism in the 1990s, while refraining from official ties with the Kurdish groups across the Middle East. Yet, after the *Mavi Marmara* crisis Israel sought for other regional allies to replace Turkey, and the Kurds were considered a possible alternative. Netanyahu's calls for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq in June 2014<sup>42</sup> implied that Israel would determine its Kurdish policy by giving less consideration to Turkish interests.<sup>43</sup> The Israelis regarded the Kurds as a secular ally that may cause problems against its arch-enemies, Iran and Iraq, in the region. With the growing sympathy towards the Kurds, some Israelis proposed that Israel should establish relations even with the Syrian Kurds<sup>44</sup> while the Syrian Kurds told the Israeli press that they seek close relations with Israel, their "only friend in the Middle East."<sup>45</sup> Understanding that supporting the PKK and its affiliated groups in Syria would worsen already weak relations with Turkey, the Israeli government refrained from any public endorsement of these groups,<sup>46</sup> but it is clear that the Israelis do not share Turkey's threat perception regarding the Syrian Kurds and they are not likely to give complete support to Turkey's Kurdish policy as happened in the past.

41 Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, "Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief", *CRS Report*, 21 March 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R44000.pdf> (Accessed on 26 July 2017).

42 "Israel's Prime Minister Backs Kurdish Independence", *The Guardian*, 29 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/29/israel-prime-minister-kurdish-independence> (Accessed on 15 September 2014).

43 Even after the rapprochement deal, the Israeli government did not change its pro-Kurdish policy in Iraq. Recently Netanyahu declared his support for the independent Kurdish state as the Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani plans to hold a referendum on September 25, 2017. Jeffrey Heller, "Israel Endorses Independent Kurdish State", *Reuters*, 13 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-kurds-israel/israel-endorses-independent-kurdish-state-idUSKCN1BO0QZ> (Accessed on 16 September 2017).

44 Ofra Bengio, "Israel Should Reach Out to Separatist Syrian Kurds", *Al-Monitor*, 14 January 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/israel-syria-kurdish-region-separatists.html> (Accessed on 16 September 2017).

45 Ami Rojkes Dombé, "Israel is Our Only Friend in the Middle East", *Israel Defense*, 8 June 2016, <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/content/israel-our-only-friend-middle-east> (Accessed on 16 September 2016).

46 For example, Netanyahu recently rebuffed a former general who stated that the PKK is not a terrorist organization. Heller, "Israel Endorses Independent Kurdish State".

Also Israel has several other national security interests in Syria. Among the Israeli objectives in Syria, one can count the promotion of a weak Assad regime, undermining the Syrian claims to the Golan Heights, preventing radical terrorists from attacking Israel, minimizing Russian influence in the region, and preventing the transfer of weapons to anti-Israeli groups through Syrian territory.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, as with Turkey, Israel has one ultimate objective in Syria: prevent the growth of Iranian influence. In the last decade, Iran has gained significant advantages in the regional balance of power. Tehran's power started growing when the United States overthrew Iran's archenemy, Saddam Hussein, in the 2003 Gulf War and left a power vacuum that was filled by Iraqi Shiites who had close relations with the Iranian government. According to various Israelis, by overlooking the Iranian threat Washington pursued several ineffective strategies in 2003 and after the war Israeli politicians "view every issue through the prism of Iran".<sup>48</sup> The Iranian nuclear program only exacerbated the issue and turned Iran into an 'existential threat' to Israel.

In this respect, the Syria civil war was a positive development for Israel at first as it was expected to lead the fall of a pro-Iranian regime in the region. Yet, the war only increased Assad's dependence on Iranian help and the latter's growing military presence – and Russian protection of these forces – in Syria created additional concerns for Israeli policymakers. In his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in August 2017, Netanyahu claimed that Iran aims to "create territorial connection from Iran to the Mediterranean, deepen military force in the air, sea and land - including tens in thousands of Shiite militias soldiers," and Israelis will not sit idly by against this military presence.<sup>49</sup> Others objected to the Iranian influence in Syria with harsher words. "In Syria, if the choice is between Iran and the Islamic State, I choose the Islamic State. They don't have the capabilities that Iran has," then Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said in a conference in January 2016.<sup>50</sup> Israeli decision makers are likely happy that Assad and radical terrorists are wearing each other down in Syria, but they are also constantly worried about Iranian actions there.

Turkey would not like to see a stronger Iran in the region as well. In February 2017, Erdoğan and other high-ranking Turkish officials accused Iran of destabilizing the region and following sectarian policies in Syria and Iraq while Iran in return criticized Ankara for dreaming about rebuilding an empire and supporting terrorist groups.<sup>51</sup> A Turkish official who talked to the local press claimed that this exchange of words between Turkey and Iran led Israel to look into the possibility of forming an anti-Iran alliance with Ankara.<sup>52</sup> However, Ankara would not like to see a change in the regional balance of power in favor of Iran, they do not consider Iranian growing influence in the region

47 Larry Hanauer, "Israel's Interests and Options in Syria", *RAND Corporation*, 2016, p.3-9, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE185.html> (Accessed 10 August 2017).

48 Frederic Wehrey *et al.*, "The Iraq Effect: The Middle East After the Iraq War", *RAND Corporation*, 2010, p.38, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND\\_MG892.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG892.pdf) (Accessed 17 September 2017).

49 "Netanyahu: Israel Will 'Do Something' about Iranian Military Presence in Syria", *i24 News*, 23 August 2017, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/153670-170823-netanyahu-tells-putin-iran-remains-a-critical-threat-to-israel-in-russia-meeting> (Accessed on 17 September 2017).

50 Judah Ari Gross, "Ya'alon: I Would Prefer Islamic State to Iran in Syria", *The Times of Israel*, 19 January 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/yaalon-i-would-prefer-islamic-state-to-iran-in-syria/> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

51 "Turkey, Iran in Spat on Eve of Syria Talks", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 21 February 2017, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkey-iran-in-spat-on-eve-of-syria-talks.aspx?PageID=238&NID=109982&NewsCatID=510> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

52 Yusuf Selman Inanç, "Anti-Iran Turkish Israeli Alliance Plausible Despite Multi-Faceted Regional Issues", *Daily Sabah*, 17 March 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/mideast/2017/03/18/anti-iran-turkish-israeli-alliance-plausible-despite-multi-faceted-regional-issues> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

an existential threat as Israel does. Instead, Turkey believes that Tehran is an important partner in dealing with the Kurdish threat, an objective shared by the Iranian officials. The Iranian Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri's visit to Turkey in August 2017, the first since 1979's Revolution, showed that both sides have important common interests in the region.<sup>53</sup> The policies of the Trump administration that threatens both Turkish and Iranian national security interests in the following period contributed more to the necessity of dialogue and cooperation between Ankara and Tehran. Therefore, if there is no major change in the regional balance of power or the change of great power policies in the Middle East, Iranian actions in Syria will not necessarily lead Turkey to cooperate with Israel.

In addition to these regional and national factors, the change in the global power system plays a role in the decline of the Syrian effect in Turkish-Israeli relations. During the Cold War and the 'unipolar moment'<sup>54</sup> in the 1990s, the United States valued the cooperation between Turkey and Israel as their partnership facilitated the implementation of its regional and global security policies. Indeed, one of the reasons behind Turkey's alliance with Israel was to receive American economic and military aid with the help of the Israeli lobby in Washington. In this respect, the 2003 Iraq War became a critical juncture as it led to fundamental changes in American foreign policy. The devastating effects of the war diminished American officials' interest in the Middle East and during Barack Obama's presidency Washington followed non-traditional policies in the region. For example, unwilling to start a war with Iran, Obama negotiated a nuclear deal with Iran which deteriorated his relations with the Netanyahu government. In his ISIS policy, on the other hand, the Obama government supported the Kurdish groups against the radicals in order to avoid putting American boots on the ground.

Both policies, reaching a deal with Iran and supporting Kurdish armed groups, was unprecedented and disregarded Israeli and Turkish national interests. They also showed that the American unipolar moment was coming to an end as the United States was not sure about what its force could accomplish. The result was less influence in Ankara and Tel Aviv. Although it was Obama who initiated the rapprochement process by persuading Netanyahu to call Erdoğan by phone, the American President was not willing to pursue the process until the end, as his relations with Erdoğan and Netanyahu became personally strained.<sup>55</sup> As a result, Turkish and Israeli leaders relied on their own strategies in pursuing their objectives in Syria. Without American coordination, Ankara sought cooperation with Russia and Iran while to balance the Iranian threat Israel initiated its "Plan B,"<sup>56</sup> finding regional allies in Iran's neighborhood such as the Kurds and Azerbaijan. These policies not only caused rifts between Washington and its traditional regional partners, but they also made Turkish-Israeli cooperation difficult in Syria as one side's measures contradicted the other's national interests. The issue only worsened after Donald Trump became the president as

53 "Common Interests: What Prompts Turkey, Iran to Increase Security Cooperation", *Sputnik News*, 19 August 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201708191056600973-turkey-iran-security-cooperation/> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

54 Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.70, No.1, 1991, p.23-33.

55 At the end of his presidency, Obama considered Erdoğan "a failure and an authoritarian" and had "deepest disappointments" about Netanyahu. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine", *The Atlantic*, April 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

56 Seymour M. Hersh, "Plan B", *The New Yorker*, 28 June 2004, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/06/28/plan-b-2> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

at the beginning of his administration he has mainly been occupied with legitimacy issues at home while lacking a coherent foreign policy.<sup>57</sup> As Trump started shaping his Middle East policy, on the other hand, his policies mainly favor Israeli interests as his decisions to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, remaining silent on Israeli use of force against Palestinians, withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear agreement and imposing sanctions against Iran demonstrate. Combined with the ongoing American support of the YPG, these policies, which increased anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings in Turkey, made Ankara rely more on cooperation with Russia and Iran while killing any chances of Turkish-Israeli cooperation in Syria.

Finally, local factors in Turkey and Israel also contributed to the decline of the Syria effect in bilateral relations. In the 1950s and 1990s, the domestic actors behind the Turkish-Israeli partnership were quite different from today. After the establishment of the Israeli state, the leftist Israeli leaders were in power and they were looking for a Muslim partner moderate enough to establish close relations in a hostile region. The Menderes government that had problems with the Arab bloc because of its pro-Western policies was the ideal choice. In the 1990s, the Turkish military sought for partnership not only to benefit from Israeli military technology but also to give a message to the pro-Islamist Necmettin Erbakan government that soldiers are responsible for national security issues. Although Netanyahu's right-wing government was in power between 1996 and 1999, he would not oppose partnership with a pro-secular army. In the 2000s, on the other hand, both sides were led by conservative parties. In Turkey, the Erdoğan government was interested in increasing Turkey's image in the Muslim world and sensitive about the Palestine issue. In Israel, the most right-wing government in Israeli history was in power<sup>58</sup> and had no intention of coming to an agreement with Palestinian groups. The result was that small developments such as a violent incident in Palestine, a statement about the status of Jerusalem or an anti-Israeli demonstration in Istanbul could affect bigger national security issues like cooperation in Syria.

## Conclusion

Throughout the history, Syria played a central role in the formation, development, and deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations. It was the mutual Syrian threat that brought political and military cooperation, and even partnership, in the 1950s and 1990s and the crisis in bilateral relations started with the failure of Turkish mediation between Israel and Syria in 2008. Therefore, it was natural to expect that the same variable, the Syrian effect, would have mended bilateral relations after the Syrian Civil War produced significant threats for both countries. The rapprochement begun in 2013 seemed to be confirming this thesis at the beginning. Yet, despite the increasing threats, including the emergence of ISIS, the rapprochement process took more than three years to complete and even after that both sides only agreed on a cold peace with the presence of mutual hostile discourse. Why did the Syrian effect not work?

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57 Jennifer Rubin, "Trump's Syria Strikes Do not Amount to a Coherent Policy", *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2017/04/10/trumps-syria-strikes-do-not-amount-to-a-coherent-policy/?utm\\_term=.1136936d3f47](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2017/04/10/trumps-syria-strikes-do-not-amount-to-a-coherent-policy/?utm_term=.1136936d3f47) (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

58 Mairav Zonszein, "Benjamin Netanyahu Just Formed the Most Right-Wing Government in Israeli History", *The Nation*, 25 May 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/benjamin-netanyahu-just-formed-the-most-right-wing-government-in-israeli-history/> (Accessed on 20 September 2017).

The answer can be found with a multidimensional explanatory methodology. First, at the national level the war in Syria not only created a multiplication of actors, but it also changed the meaning of the Syrian threat and created different national security issues for Turkey and Israel. Turkey reads the Syrian civil war through the Kurdish prism while Israel focuses on the growing Iranian influence in Syria. These changes in Syria interact with the regional balance of power and the regional power competition between various actors. By looking at the global level, on the other hand, we see that the lack of American coordination and declining American influence in Turkey and Israel during the Obama period and the pro-Israeli policies of the Trump administration made cooperation between both sides less likely as they needed to follow different and contradictory strategies to deal with their main national security issues. Finally, at the local level, the presence of conservative parties in Turkey and Israel caused small developments to affect bigger issues such as the cooperation in Syria. In sum, the interaction of these variables at different levels created the decline of the Syrian effect in Turkish-Israeli relations and it seems that this complexity will persist for a time if no major changes take place at the local, national, regional and global level.