

## **BOOK REVIEW**

Ayşegül SEVER and Orna ALMOG, *Contemporary Israeli-Turkish Relations in Comparative Perspective*

(London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

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# Contemporary Israeli-Turkish Relations in Comparative Perspective

**Ayşegül SEVER and Orna ALMOG**

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*Contemporary Israeli-Turkish Relations in Comparative Perspective* is a comprehensive book written by eleven academics from Turkey and Israel. Even though the book covers a broad range of topics written by authors from different theoretical perspectives, the outcome is strong in terms of both consistency and continuity. The authors' diverse perspectives are combined with a well-integrated collection of chapters around particular themes prompting readers to think in new ways.

The first chapter of the book gives general insights on Turkish-Israeli relations with a historical background and argues that the last decade is the most challenging period in the history of Turkish-Israeli relations. The second chapter attempts to compare national identity building in both countries and focuses on the role of religious narratives in the nation-building policies. Without a doubt, Israel and Turkey had different historical backgrounds. While Turkish nation was rebuilt after the collapse of a multi-national empire, Jewish nation had no state for more than two thousand years. Both states attempted to build secular nation-states relatively independent from their respective religious identities. In fact, for both states, during their foundational period the western world was taken as an example of a positive model as opposed to what they perceive as a Middle Eastern model. Thus, based on such similarities, this chapter underlines the resemblances between two state identities, Kemalism and Zionism and two respective leaders, Atatürk and Ben Gurion. The chapter concludes by stating how the impact of religion on bilateral relations between two nations increased in the last two decades, which in turn worsened bilateral relations.

The third chapter is about the impact of civil society organizations on bilateral relations. The chapter analyzes and compares civil society organizations in both countries and reaches to the conclusion that in both cases civil societies are highly politicized and shaped by their relations with the incumbents. In fact, civil society organizations that are siding with the governments prosper economically and the ones in the opposition face constant difficulties. The authors then show how civil society organizations in both countries are accused of being disloyal or even traitors when they oppose the views of governing parties.

Fourth chapter focuses on the Mavi Marmara incident of 2010 as the turning point of Turkish-Israeli relations. After that incident, cooperation between two states experienced sharp decline in all areas, except trade. Editors analyze facts to readers by summarizing the events after the remarkable Mavi Marmara incident. After the Mavi Marmara incident, politicians from both sides tried to exploit each other's vulnerabilities (such as the Kurdish issue in Turkey or the Gaza issue in Israel) which made the relations even worse. In 2016, Turkey and Israel reached an agreement but even this did not help bilateral relations to return to the levels prior to Mavi Marmara. The chapter underlines the importance of "critical events" in bilateral relations and puts the Mavi Marmara incident in a broader political perspective.

The fifth chapter of the book is about how relations of Turkey, Israel and Greece changed over last two decades. Before 2008, relations between Turkey and Israel were considered to be good but after the Israeli offensive on Gaza, relations got worse and Israel began to look for other alliance opportunities. After the Mavi Marmara incident, Israeli government shifted its alliance policies in Eastern Mediterranean, and began to approach Greece. The consequence of this approach was the formation of Greek-Cypriot-Israeli alliance, which in turn heightened Turkey's security concerns even more. However, this chapter argues that this alliance is in its early stages and political elites of Israel are still inclined to see Turkey as a better partner in the region due to its economic and military capabilities.

The sixth chapter analyzes impact of Syrian Civil War on Turkish-Israeli relations. The chapter indicates that as Syria's neighbors, Israel and Turkey were directly affected by the Syrian civil war. Despite their bilateral disagreements, both had similar views over Syria. The seventh chapter is then focused on economic relations between two states in three areas: imports and exports, natural resource trade and tourism. The chapter concludes that both countries have complimentary economies and due to the geographical closeness, they benefit from bilateral trade. Even with multiple crises in diplomatic relations, trade between two countries survived and prospered in recent years. In other words, this chapter analyzes the bilateral relations using a compartmentalization perspective in which trade could be separated when there is conflict in bilateral relations. Chapter eight then reveals the natural gas developments in the region, and shows that similar to the trade relations, natural gas demands and market searches of two countries complement each other. The chapter on energy provides detailed information supported by various data, which some readers may find it hard to follow. Finally, the last chapter is about changing tourism patterns between the two countries. Turkey, once a top destination for Israeli tourists, became an unattractive spot for the Israelis not just because of the worsening relations after the Mavi Marmara incident, but also because of changing perceptions of Turkey among the Israelis. Specifically, Turkish tourism was heavily affected by terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016.

While the collection is definitely a contribution to the analysis of bilateral relations, at times it lacks an in-depth analysis of the issues at hand. Particularly, some chapters are mostly a summary of previously published material and lack originality. Furthermore, chapters do not refer to common analytical framework and are not connected to each other by similar questions. In fact, in many chapters similar information is provided in a repetitive manner such as the Mavi Marmara incident. However, the book still provides well-grounded background information to the readers who are interested in Turkish-Israeli relations. It covers a wide range of topics, which is both the strength and weakness of this edited volume.