



The Future of Israeli-Turkish Relations

By Shira Efron

Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 2018, 54 pp.,
Paper. £14.99 (Paperback). ISBN 9781977400864.

*Reviewed by Tuğçe Ersoy
Department of International Relations, İzmir Demokrasi University, İzmir*

The opinions expressed in this review represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the TRT World Research Centre.

As non-Arab states in the Middle East, Turkey and Israel have sometimes been considered as natural allies. Turkey was among the first countries that officially recognized Israel as a sovereign state in 1948 and various points of commonality have paved the way for what would later evolve into what some have described as a strategic partnership. Notwithstanding, bilateral relations have not always been perfect. Ties between the two countries have varied depending on the prevailing political climate. Thus, more than sixty years of bilateral relations have been marked with ups and downs due to changing conjuncture and diversifying of interests of both states.

Shira Efron's *The Future of Israeli -Turkish Relations* offers general readers a short, but comprehensive evaluation of the subject beginning with a history of bilateral relations and ending with the projection of what the relationship might look like moving forward. However, the book examines the nature of Israeli - Turkish relations with a special focus on the Israeli perspective. Ultimately, the work presents the scene of bilateral relations as it is understood from the Israeli perspective. Nevertheless, it might be a valuable source for readers who would like to learn more about the Israeli perspective.

Efron's work is not only grounded in the existing literature on the subject, but also on an array of in-depth conversations with current and former Israeli officials, providing the reader with first-hand perspectives on the issues in question. The uniqueness of the work lies in its "providing insight into current Israeli thinking on the status of economic and political bilateral ties twenty months after normalization", a process that began in 2016 when Turkey and Israel formally reconciled following years of diplomatic tensions that were exacerbated by the Mavi Marmara incident, among others. Having said that, its deficiency lies in not having included in-depth conversations with Turkish policy makers, which would have given the reader a more complete picture.

The book argues that more diplomatic and security cooperation between Turkey and Israel is unlikely anytime soon, despite the 2016 reconciliation that was initially encouraging to certain stakeholders in both

countries. After a brief introduction, chapters two and three cover the history of Israeli-Turkish relations and describe the six-year reconciliation process. Chapter four deals with the status of bilateral economic relations with a special focus on trade, energy and tourism. It is chapter five which might be treated as being the core of the book since it introduces the key ongoing political dimensions between Israel and Turkey. The Palestinian issue, the situation in Syria, relations with Iran, the Kurdish issue and Israel's new ties with Greece and Cyprus are the main hot-button issues discussed in this chapter. The author asserts that the lack of agreement on these issues are the determinants that make any near or medium-term diplomatic and security cooperation unlikely.

Although the book details the chronology of Turkish-Israeli relations, it fails to provide an in-depth analysis of the divergent narratives regarding the key events that led to the deterioration in relations. Efron acknowledges the fact that the book is written with a focus on the Israeli perspective, however, her analysis of the issues, such as Mavi Marmara incident, are not adequately balanced for the reader to be able to develop a clear understanding of the attitudes of both sides. For example, in her discussion of the Mavi Marmara incident, the author concludes that the "Mavi Marmara did not heed Israeli navy warnings" and fails to acknowledge the Turkish argument that the flotilla was located on international waters and that Israel had no right to intervene.

The book advances the perspective that Israel and Turkey share common interests and that Israel considers that Turkey is ultimately an important country in containing Iranian influence. Efron is right in assessing that the reconciliation process has been determined by economic interests in both states and in defining both sides' decisions as 'pragmatic'. Despite this fact, the author insists that "the diplomatic relations will be kept at a low profile as long as Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remains in charge". Quoting the delineation of Israeli officials in the defence and diplomatic realms who consider Erdoğan as "unreliable, erratic and anti-Semitic", the author chooses not to make any criticism or present any counter-argument against these trope-like explanations.

Since the book provides an overview of Israeli – Turkish relations as of January 2018, it is worth reading in order to gain an understanding of the current state of affairs regarding bilateral relations between the two countries. It shows that the bilateral ties have been inconsistent since the June 2016 rapprochement due to ongoing political disagreements. Although the book does not make explicit conclusion regarding feelings vis-à-vis the Turkish President, it is possible to deduce that the thinking of Israel officials regarding Erdoğan have influenced the reluctance on the Israeli side of advancing relations with Turkey. Nevertheless, Efron concludes that “Israel and Turkey have some strong mutual interests” and that “when Israel and Turkey want to collaborate, they find ways to the so”, despite the fact that any diplomatic or security cooperation seems unlikely at present.