


The Moshe Dayan Center
for Middle Eastern and African Studies



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

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INSIGHTS ON TURKISH AFFAIRS

EDITORS: HAY EYTAN COHEN YANAROCAK & CENG SAGNIC

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From the Editors

Dear Friends,

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is proud to present our latest issue of our monthly publication, *Turkeyscope*. This issue of *Turkeyscope* focuses on the attitude of the Israeli and Turkish media towards the bilateral relations. Israel's Channel 2 Foreign Affairs Editor Arad Nir provides an insider's perspective on the media's gradual loss of interest in the Jerusalem – Ankara axis.

Sarah Jacobs contributed to this issue as assistant editor.

Current Israel Turkey relations as expressed by the media

Arad Nir

On December 5, 2016, the newly appointed Israeli ambassador presented his credentials to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Ambassador Eitan Naeh is the first Israeli ambassador to Ankara since the 2010 Mavi Marmara crisis, during which ten Turkish citizens were killed in a clash with Israeli soldiers attempting to prevent the so-called Peace Flotilla from breaking the Israeli naval blockade on Gaza. Ambassador Naeh and his family were welcomed at the presidential palace in Beştepe Ankara. Upon arrival at the thousand room presidential complex, the whole family was invited to the president's office, where Erdoğan spent an informal hour in warm conversation with the Naehs. Afterwards, Erdoğan personally escorted the Ambassador, his wife, his children, and his entourage to the reception foyer, where the official ceremony took place. The ceremony included an honor guard of Turkish soldiers and a rendition of Israel's national anthem, *Hatikvah*. This lavish event was the culmination of years of intensive negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations between the two formerly allied regional powers. However, despite the magnitude of the event, Israeli and Turkish media reports were relatively muted. To the surprise of Israeli diplomats, the Presidential Press Office in Ankara did not publicize President Erdoğan's effusive overtures towards the newly appointed Israeli ambassador. As a result, the event did not gain traction in Turkish media. Likewise, the Israeli media, which had carefully followed the two countries' negotiations, gave scant attention to the event at which Ambassador Naeh presented his credentials in Ankara.

A few days later, Ambassador Naeh's counterpart, Kemal Ökem, the newly appointed Turkish ambassador to Israel, was received in Jerusalem with equal warmth by President Reuven Rivlin, to whom he presented his credentials. President Rivlin has supported reconciliation with Turkey since his days as Speaker of the Knesset, and has used his presidency to advance this goal. President Rivlin's office publicized the ceremony, expressing the President's commitment to Israeli-Turkish bilateral relations. However, the Israeli media did not treat the ceremony as a significant story. Likewise, Turkish media reported bare facts with no additional analysis.

However, the media's disinterest in this topic is a relatively recent phenomenon. Nearly half a year earlier, on June 27, 2016, Israeli and Turkish television live broadcast the declaration of the reconciliation agreement between the two governments. As this cold normalization was driven by mutual interests, the sides declared the agreement from separate locations — with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in Ankara and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Rome, where he was meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Israeli and Turkish television used split screen to broadcast the simultaneous ceremonies in Italy and Turkey. This was the last time the Israeli media gave Israeli-Turkish bilateral relations high-profile coverage. Nevertheless, this lack of media interest should not be misconstrued as indifference to the relationship between the two countries.

In fact, the Turkish media frequently refers to Israel, utilizing classic antisemitic stereotypes. Through euphemisms such as the “Jewish lobby” and “Zionism,” Israel is often identified as the source of all evil – from the failed coup attempt to the terror attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State (IS) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – PKK). Since the Mavi Marmara crisis, during Turkish election campaigns for parliament (June 2011 and November 2015), local government (2014), and president (2014), Erdoğan used harsh anti-Israel rhetoric. This rhetoric was echoed by the Turkish media, and then quoted by Israeli media. After normalizing diplomatic relations, the official tone towards Israel changed dramatically, although Israel continued to be blamed for Turkey’s ills. For instance, on December 20, 2016, in the pro-government *Yeni Şafak*, Tamer Korkmaz wrote: “The PKK is exactly like Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü - FETÖ) and IS; it too is a terror organization that attacks to fulfill the deep purposes of the Crusader-Zionist Alliance.” In their reports to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israeli diplomats serving in Turkey have repeatedly expressed their frustration with Turkish media outlets' and analysts' depictions of Israel. The harsh rhetoric against Israel intensified in a television episode on the Turkish government channel, TRT, depicting a fictitious attempt to assassinate the Israeli consul in Turkey. The broadcast of this episode preceded the assassination of the Russian ambassador, Andrei Karlov, on December 19, 2016, in Ankara. However, neither the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor the Israeli media has reacted to this continued antisemitic discourse as it reacted in 2009, when a popular Turkish television series

depicted Israeli soldiers as baby killers. At the time, Israel's Foreign Ministry summoned the Turkish ambassador, Oğuz Çelikkol, to a diplomatic démarche, now known as the "Low Chair" incident.

In addition to declining interest in Turkish criticism of Israel, Israeli media has lost interest in the majority of Turkish domestic affairs. Despite Israeli media coverage of terror attacks in Turkey and the failed coup attempt, the Israeli media has ignored the post-coup purge of Turkey's government, army, judiciary, and education system. Israeli media also seems indifferent to the repression of Turkish journalists and media. That being said, the Israeli media has drawn comparisons between President Erdoğan's control over Turkish media, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's seemingly similar aspirations.

The Israeli media's attitude towards Turkey was showcased by coverage of President Erdoğan's exclusive interview by Israeli Channel 2's *Uvda*. In the interview at his palace, Erdoğan reiterated his well-known criticisms of Israel, bashed the interviewer, and made no indication that Turkey and Israel would be turning a new page. This interview, and the messages that it conveyed, received minimal attention in the Israeli media. On the other hand, the Turkish media quoted it extensively.

This tableau exhibits the Israeli media's gradual loss of interest in the nuances of Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations. Since normalization, major events in Turkey are receiving coverage, but minor developments have lost the appeal they had during the heyday of the diplomatic crisis. In parallel, the Turkish media is less concerned with events related to the continuous Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, but continues to produce the same messaging on Zionism and world Jewry.

Arad Nir is Foreign Affairs Editor and International Commentator for Channel 2 News, Israel's largest news provider.

The Moshe Dayan Center publishes *Turkeyscope* as a monthly analytical discussion on Turkish national and geopolitical affairs. *Turkeyscope* is published approximately on the 15th of every month, as well as occasional Special Editions.

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