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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey since 2011: from adverse asymmetry to equivalence?

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Abstract

Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to recognise Israel de facto in 1949. Since then, Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey has generated stimulating academic debate, converging around the assumption that Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey is defined by an adverse asymmetry (Bengio in The Turkish–Israeli relationship: Changing ties of Middle Eastern outsiders, 2004 and in Insight Turkey 11(2):43–55, 2009; Inbar in Israel Affairs 11(4):591–607, 2005) that favours Turkey. Israel, it has been argued, has always been in the position of courting Turkey, the senior partner in the relationship. This article challenges this contention. It proposes a new analytical framework that encompasses foreign policy friction, discord and alignment and an integrative approach to examine the strategic, economic, military and energy aspects of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey. The within-case study methodology employed shows that the confluence among the policies pursued by Israel since 2011—amid regional trends and a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar global order—has prompted a shift in Israeli foreign policy from an adverse asymmetry to an equivalence-based engagement with Turkey.

Keywords Israel · Foreign policy · Turkey · Netanyahu · Asymetry

Introduction

In 1949, Turkey was the first Muslim-majority country to de facto recognise Israel, followed by *de jure* recognition in 1950. Since then, Israeli foreign policy makers have deemed relations with Turkey as extremely important. The ties with Ankara helped to break Israel's isolation within the Middle East and economic relations with Turkey expanded steadily. Turkey and Israel accumulated useful intelligence-sharing capacity and engaged, intermittently, in military cooperation. The alliance between Israel and Turkey and the USA helped Israeli foreign

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policy makers to manage this bilateral relationship. However, Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey was constrained by the Arab–Israeli conflict, especially the Israeli–Palestinian component.

Within this complex foreign policy context, the key objective of this article is to challenge the conventional wisdom reflected in academic studies (Bengio 2004; 2009; Bengio and Ozcan 2001: 50; Inbar 2005) that Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey is defined by an adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey. By this, it is meant that Israel has always been in the position of courting Turkey, the senior partner in the relationship, to overcome reluctance from Ankara. However, I will argue that a confluence of policies pursued by Israel since 2011 has prompted a shift in this relationship from an adverse asymmetry to equivalence. I substantiate my argument, based on three aspects that, in the past, reflected the adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey. These aspects include Israel's legitimacy deficit in the Middle East, Turkey's erstwhile strategic and military value to Israel and Israel's economic and especially energy ties with Turkey. I will show that current debate has overlooked the significant shift from adverse asymmetry to equivalence that has taken place between 2011 and the present and is reflected in these indicators.

The research methodology is within-case study (George and Bennet 2005), using primary data from the Israeli, Turkish and Greek foreign ministries, reports produced by international organisations, and other official and media accounts. In addition, rather than zooming in on a single aspect, such as the Turkey–Israel–Greece triangle (Nachmani 1987), energy ties (Ersoy 2019; Rettig 2021), economic relations (Rivlin 2019) or individual events such as the fatal Mavi Marmara incident and its aftermath (Aran and Yishayahu 2022), the integrative analytical approach adopted, examines various aspects of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey in combination. It demonstrates how aspects of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey since 2011 have evolved and intersected during the shift from adverse asymmetry to equivalence.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section identifies the main strands of the debate on Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey and, especially the convergence within academic work, around claims that it is defined by an adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey. It situates Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey along a foreign policy spectrum, going from friction to discord to alignment, which provides the analytical and historical backdrop to the empirical sections of the paper. The third and fourth sections use this analytical framework to trace the shift from contesting the asymmetry in Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey following the Mavi Marmara crisis, to engagement with Turkey based on equivalence during the Israel–Hamas 2023–2024 war.

The last three sections discuss the diminution in Turkey's strategic, military, economic and political significance for Israel, as the result of Israel's policies between 2011 and the present period. To this end, section five explores how equivalence was shored up by the Israeli pivot towards Cyprus and Greece. The sixth part examines how the shift to equivalence was consolidated by the 2020 Abrahams peace accords. The final section highlights how the rise of the 'energy factor' in Israeli foreign policy has had a reinforcing effect on the ability of Israel to engage with Turkey based on equivalence.

Setting the conceptual, analytical and historical context

This section has three aims: first, to map the debate on Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey thematically; second, to substantiate my claim that current debate converges around the notion that Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey is marked by an adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey; and third, to examine the key terms comprising the foreign policy spectrum in terms of discord, alignment and friction (Yishayahu 2021) in which the present analysis is situated. Alignment is often, wrongly, understood as meaning alliance. However, in a landmark study, Synder (1997: 4) explains that alliances refer to 'formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership'. Differently, alignment is often an ad hoc arrangement, established to deal with a specific issue, whereas alliances tend to be more enduring and forged to address a clearly defined and planned for future threat (Rice 1997). Accordingly, Wilkins (2012: 56) describes alignments as not necessarily signified by formal treaties or focused primarily on military activity, but rather delineated by functional areas of cooperation such as energy, economic, diplomatic, military, political relations.

The scope and persistence of functional areas of cooperation define the position of a foreign policy relationship along the friction–discord–alignment continuum. Foreign policy discord denotes a situation where ad hoc commitments comprising alignment cease, resulting in the scope and nature the functional areas of cooperation to contract or even end altogether. These may include the decline in diplomatic relations, reduced diplomatic representation and more hostile rhetoric, weaker economic ties or an interruption to military and intelligence cooperation. Friction entails the reduction of functional areas of cooperation entailed by discord in addition to an increased probability of military hostilities—even if they do not materialise—emanating from kinetic/cyber (Lindsey 2015) friction or both.

We move next to thematically examine the debate on Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey, situating it analytically within the friction–discord–alignment foreign policy continuum. This rich debate revolved around three key themes. The first is the period between the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the end of the Cold War. Several studies (Bengio 2004; Abadi 1995; Goren and Lindenstrauss 2024; Athanassopoulou 2024) discuss the foreign policy determinants of Israel's efforts to forge the closest possible relations with Turkey. They include the significance of Turkey's geographical location for Israel, which, until 1979, was in a state of conflict with all of its other territorial neighbours. In this regard, there is a substantial stream of work (Shlaim 2014: 198–232; Bengio 2004: 33–71; Alpher 2015) on the role of Turkey—plus Iran and Ethiopia—in Israel's late 1950s' Periphery Doctrine. Further work pertaining to the Cold War strand (Nachmani 2008; Eran 2010: 32) examined how Israeli foreign policy makers sought to build on the perception that Turkey was part of the friendly trans-Atlantic European community camp, in order to improve and deepen the relationship.

However, the Arab–Israeli conflict served to reduce the effectiveness of these efforts, as demonstrated by the stream of work on the regional reaction to Israeli–Turkish relations during the Cold War (Abadi 1995; Bengio and Ozcan 2001: 57–62; Bengio 2004:

74–75, 132–134). During periods when this conflict escalated, such as the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 and 1973 Arab–Israeli wars, Turkey tended to show solidarity with the Arab states and the Palestinian quest for statehood. From Turkey's perspective, overt relations with Israel risked loss of the benefits Turkey enjoyed from Arab political and economic cooperation and support, which as the conflict between Turkey, Greece and Cyprus intensified at the beginning of the 1960s, were deemed increasingly critical.

In this context, Bengio (2004:3; 2009:46) convincingly argues that Turkey's Arab state leanings and its support for the Palestinian cause created an adverse asymmetry in Israel–Turkey relations. The asymmetry was adverse in that Israel was driven to do 'everything possible to strengthen relations with Ankara…almost all the initiatives for improving or upgrading relations came from Israel's side…the Jewish state was completely dependent on Turkey's good will' (Bengio 2004: 3). Within this adverse asymmetric relationship, Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey during the Cold War was marked by discord. Diplomatic and military relations remained covert and hidden from the public and economic ties continued to be modest despite weapons sales and Israeli tourism to Turkey continuing uninterrupted (Abadi 1995: 6).

Alignment and adverse asymmetry amid the end of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War and Iraq's defeat in the 1990–1991 Gulf war has resulted in a rich literature tracing the new opportunities presented before Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey (Bengio 2004: 71–80; Nachmani 1998; Nachmani 2003: 201; Inbar 2001a, b; 2009). These studies underline that, unlike during the Cold War, following the 1991 Madrid peace conference, the Oslo Peace process and the Israel–Jordan and Israel–Syria peace tracks, expanding Israeli–Turkish relations and Turkish–Arab relations, became mutually compatible. Nahcmani's (2003: 205–206) work shines a light on how the Syrian–Greek military agreement pushed Turkey closer to Israel, whilst Altunisik's (2000) and Bengio's (2009:45) important interventions reveal the convergence in the Turkey's and Israel's interest in containing Syria and Iran.

This regional perspective was coupled by insightful work on domestic foreign policy determinants (Bengio 2004: 81–89; Ersoy 2019: 114–115; Nachmani 2003: 216–218; Tur 2012: 47). An important part of this literature was devoted to the rising influence of the Turkish military in the country's domestic politics and its Middle East foreign policy in response to the challenges posed by the PKK and Syria. This strand of work shows that the Turkish military became the driving force in the alignment with Israel, the rationale being that the military would benefit significantly from Israel's willingness to upgrade and supply otherwise unavailable weapons and demonstrate to the USA its value post-Cold War.

Studies of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey immediately after the Cold War, (Bengio 2004, 103–127; Nachmani 2003: 221–230; Inbar 2005: 592) demonstrate the shift from discord to alignment. In 1991, diplomatic relations were restored to ambassadorial level, in 1993, Israel and Turkey signed a free trade agreement (Israel Ministry of Economy and Industry 2023), and culminating in the accord signed on 23 February 1996, a series of comprehensive military agreements were concluded. The February 1996 accord stipulated cooperation related to transfer of

military technology, joint military training to be held in both countries, and regional and international cooperation to promote peace. As Bengio's (2004: 138–156) and Nachmani's (2003: 231–235) studies reveal, with the exception of Jordan most of the Arab states reacted negatively to this Israeli–Turkish post-Cold War alignment.

Notably, the shift from discord to alignment did not prompt academic re-examination of the concept of adverse asymmetry in Israeli–Turkish relations. The prevailing idea of Turkey's significance for conferring regional and global legitimacy on Israel following the end of the Cold War persisted. It was also still seen as providing significant opportunities for military and strategic cooperation and an improved regional power balance towards Israel vis-à-vis Syria, Iran and Hezbollah. The prevailing view of the foreign policy dyad during the 1990s is reflected in Inbar's (2005: 596) comment on Israel's continuing asymmetric alignment with Turkey that 'Turkey needs Israel less than the other way round'.

Persistent asymmetry and challenges to alignment under the AKP

A third major theme in the debate relates to the regional strategic approach in studies of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey following the rise to power of the *Adalet Kalkinma Partisi* (AKP) in 2002 (Bengio 2009, 2010; Inbar 2005: 602–607; Muminov 2024; Oztig 2024). This stream of work too is wedded to the notion of adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey (Bengio 2010: 17).

This body of work usefully highlights the links among the changed post-2000 regional foreign policy environment, the emergence of the AKP and the AKP's influence on Israel's alignment position. The collapse in September 2000 of the Israeli–Palestinian Oslo peace process triggered the al-Aqsa Intifada and was followed by an increasingly hostile rhetoric from Ankara and Prime Minister Erdogan's branding of Israel as a terrorist state (Guardian 2024). The 9/11 attacks in the USA and the ensuing Global War on Terror positioned Israel and Turkey on different sides with Israel supporting and Turkey opposing the March 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

Ozil and Nasi (2019: 149–151), Bengio (2009: 44) and Ulusoy (2020) all show how the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime by the USA in 2003 enabled Turkey to play a more active part in the region. The AKP introduced its 'zero problems with neighbours' foreign policy, sought to act as mediator in conflict resolutions and to use Islam as the 'glue' binding the region's three nationalities—Turks, Arabs and Iranians—in its bid for regional leadership. Tur (2012: 53–54), Bengio (2009: 46) and Aran (2020: 345–346, 359–360) explore the implications of the AKP's zero-problem foreign policy for Israel. For a short period and especially following the easing of some tension resulting from Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it seemed that Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey was veering towards alignment. In its 2007–2008 negotiations with Syria, under the Olmert government, Israel subsequently used Turkey's mediation services. Nevertheless, Israel's alignment with Turkey under the zero-problem foreign policy position was problematic in terms of Ankara's support for Israel's staunchest enemies. Turkey condoned Iran's nuclear efforts and the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah,

it cooperated with the pre-Arab uprisings al-Assad regime and it established close links with the Palestinian Islamic Resistance movement, Hamas.

Indeed, Turkey was the first country to invite a five-man delegation, led by the then head of the Hamas Political Bureau, Khaled Mashal, to make an official visit to meet Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, following Hamas's 2006 victory in the Palestinian legislative elections (Zaman 2006). Subsequently, Turkey 'supported Hamas in Gaza' after it took over the Strip by force in 2007 (Eran 2011: 33; Eran 2013: 1). Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan continued to erode the alignment as the conflict between Israel and Hamas intensified and, following the launch of Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza (December–February 2009), mounted a particularly fierce attack on Israel. Turkey received no advance warning of Operation Cast Lead, despite it starting only a few days after the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's official visit to Turkey. Feeling betrayed and deceived, a furious Prime Minister Erdogan stormed out of a joint session with the then Israeli president, Shimon Peres, at the annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos. Fuming, Erdogan accused Israel that 'when it comes to killing you know how to kill' (Bennhold 2009).

In 2010, what came to be known as the fatal Mavi Marmara incident, dealt a devastating blow to Israel's alignment with Turkey. On 31 May 2010, the IHH (Istanbul-based Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief)—an NGO with Islamist sympathies that Israel claimed had terrorist links with Hamas—chartered a ship and set sail from Istanbul to the Gaza Strip, leading an international coalition of activists. The aim was to break the Israeli naval blockade on the Gaza Strip by delivering aid and, through the inevitable clash with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), to create a media spectacle (Aran and Yishayahu 2022). Following a failed attempt to change its course, Israeli commandos stormed the IHH vessel, killing 9 Turkish passengers and wounding another 50 Turkish citizens. Nine Israeli Navy commandoes were also injured.

The collapse of Israel's foreign policy of alignment towards Turkey was followed by a short, but acute period of friction. Following the fatal Mavi Marmara incident, the then US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton (2014: 321), recalled that, 'Foreign Minister Davutoglu came to see me for a meeting that lasted for two hours. He was highly emotional and threatened that Turkey might declare war on Israel' (Clinton 2014: 322). This state of friction was ended swiftly by active US mediation, which was followed by a prolonged period of discord. Ambassadors were recalled, military and intelligence cooperation ceased and both parties issued vitriolic threats (Blomfield 2011; Reuters 2014).

Any attempt at a return by Israel to an alignment foreign policy stance, faced significant hurdles. The influence of the Turkish army—the driving force behind the 1990s shift from discord to alignment—over domestic politics and foreign policy, declined significantly under the AKP and especially during the 2007 and 2010 Ergenekon and Balyoz trials (Tur 2012: 51; Nasi 2022: 4). Also, in addition to the foreign policy divergence over the Palestinian issue and regional ties, especially with Syria and Iran, Turkey was demanding a formal apology from Israel for the fatal Mavi Marmara incident and compensation for the victims of the attack. Ankara then raised the stakes by demanding the lifting of the land and naval blockades imposed

by Israel and Egypt, on the Gaza Strip (The Times 2011; Saltzman 2015: 259; Efron 2018: 11).

This section set provides the conceptual, analytical and historical setting for the empirical examination. It identifies the key themes in the debate, situating Israeli foreign policy analytically along the friction–discord–alignment foreign policy continuum. It provides evidence of the continued prevailing belief that the Israeli–Turkish bilateral relationship is asymmetric and favours Turkey which the succeeding integrative account of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey since 2011 contests. The sections that follow show that, in the period 2011 to the present, this bilateral relationship has undergone the significant shift from adverse asymmetry to equivalence and that this shift has been overlooked by the literature. The following exploration of this far from straight forward or linear shift begins with a discussion of Israel's response immediately following the Mavi Marmara incident.

Contesting asymmetry

Israel's decision-making group offered two different responses to Turkey's demands following the fatal Mavi Marmara incident. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Ehud Barak immediately expressed 'regret' for the incident (Ravid 2010a) and, using the traditional foreign policy asymmetry lens, which favoured Turkey, considered making the called-for apology. The response of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Liberman was quite different and was based on his long-standing belief in (Liberman 2004) the importance of honour in international politics. In my review of Liberman's position, my intention is not to analyse the influence of emotion, in the form of honour, which Salzman (2015) has examined excellently. Rather, my aim is to spotlight an overlooked aspect of Liberman's emphasis on Israel maintaining its honour vis-à-vis Turkey, which is that his stance constitutes the first challenge to the policy of adverse asymmetry with Turkey.

The different approaches of Netanyahu, Barak and Liberman emerged quickly. Having expressed his regret for the lives lost during the Mavi Marmara incident, Netanyahu sought to contain the situation. To this end, he dispatched a senior Israeli minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, to meet with Turkey's foreign minister, Davutoglu, to discuss the countries' relations (Ravid 2010b). Netanyahu also agreed to a United Nations (UN) commission, led by former New Zealand Prime Minister, Sir Geofrey Palmer, to investigate the fatal incident (Palmer 2011).

In contrast, Liberman rejected Turkey's demands. He insisted that the IDF raid was reasonable and that an apology, as a precondition for the restoration of Israeli–Turkish relations, would undermine Israel's national honour (Eglitis and Harvey 2010). Subsequently, amid the widespread anti-Israeli demonstrations greeting the return of the Mavi Marmara to Turkey, Liberman doubled down on his position stating that, in the context of Turkey, Israel was trying to hold back, but 'we cannot let ourselves become a punching bag' (Jerusalem Post 2011). His resolution to uphold Israeli honour resulted in his staunch opposition to the restoration of Israeli–Turkish relations, following publication of the partial Palmer UN

investigative report. The report found that the naval blockade was legal, but was critical of both Israel and Turkey—the former for its excessive force raiding the Mavi Marmara in international waters and the latter for allowing the vessel to set sail (Palmer 2011). Liberman continued to frame the entire Mavi Marmara fallout as competition for honour and standing in the Middle East, arguing that 'Turkey wants to humiliate the State of Israel, sap its international standing, and harm [Israel's] standing in the region' (Salzman 2015: 260). Liberman's fierce opposition to an apology, on grounds that it violated Israel's honour, meant that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu could not action even the 'soft' apology he had already approved (Salzman 2015: 261).

Liberman's insistence that Israel should defend its honour, which reflected his approach of engaging with Turkey on the basis of equivalence, contrasted sharply with the position adopted by Defence Minister Barak. Barak was pragmatic and stated that 'national pride is important, but we have to understand that we have other interests here' (Harel 2011). The interests to which Barak refers and which reflected his view that the relationship remained asymmetric and favourable to Turkey, concerned the military deals with Turkey, which were all cancelled following the Mavi Marmara incident. Frustratingly for Barak, Liberman was immovable. Thus, amid the foreign minister's sustained rejection of Turkey's demand for an apology, military cooperation with Turkey was limited to the sharing of intelligence about terrorism (Efron 2018: 34).

To the chagrin of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister of Defence Barak, Liberman's approach of engaging Turkey on the basis of equivalence gained wider political support from within the Prime Minister's party, Likud. Significantly, Minister for Intelligence and Strategic Affairs and former IDF Chief of Staff, Moshe Ya'alon, strongly supported Liberman's stance. The repercussions for foreign policy were serious and forced the Prime Minister to proceed against his better judgement. On 17 August 2011, Netanyahu reluctantly informed Secretary of State Clinton that he had accepted the view of Ministers Lieberman and Ya'alon that Israel should not issue an apology to Turkey (Somfalvi 2011a). However, in March 2013, after Liberman had left the government and amid mounting US pressure, Israel issued an apology. During President Obama's first official visit to Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu, in a phone call to Prime Minister Erdogan, issued a formal apology (Sherwood 2013; Somfalvi 2011b).

The 2010–2013 period marks a subtle, but significant shift in Israel's foreign policy approach towards Turkey. The long-standing foreign policy consensus of Israeli–Turkish relations as asymmetrically favouring Turkey was contested by the notion that Israel should engage with Turkey through equivalence. By prioritising honour over strategic security interests, defined by the inclination of the Israeli defence minister and the prime minister to 'mend fences', foreign minister Liberman was absolutely opposed to Israel's previous policy stance. Although his influence prevailed only temporarily, it delayed the reconciliation between Israel and Turkey and reflected a budding equivalence in Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey.

From contested asymmetry to equivalence

The above discussion of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara fatal incident reveals how the honour-based posture adopted by Foreign Minister Liberman contested adverse asymmetry and its impact. In this section, I provide a broader view by tracing how, during the various tumults between 2011 and the present period, Israeli foreign policy behaviour reflected a gradual, but persistent shift in engagement with Turkey from adverse asymmetry to equivalence. Both recent examinations of this period from a Turkish perspective (Oztig 2024; Aviv 2024) and the works cited above, which take an Israeli perspective, overlook this significant change.

The prolonged fallout from the Mavi Marmara fatal incident coincided with the Arab uprisings in 2011, by which point the Palestinian national movement was affected by ongoing division. In the West Bank, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority was in control of the main cities, designated area A in the Oslo Accords, and was responsible for civic matters in area B, which included 27% of the West Bank (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024). Israel had control in area C, which included 60% of the West Bank, and was responsible for security in area B. However, following their win in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, in August 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip by force. Israel responded by spearheading an international effort to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on Hamas and engaged in regular military clashes with Hamas, which peaked in the Cast Lead (2008–2009) Pillar of Cloud (2012), Protective Edge (2014) and Guarantor of the Walls (2020–2021) operations. In contrast, Turkey's foreign policy was accommodating of Hamas. It recognised Hamas's rule over the Gaza Strip, permitted its political and military wings to operate in Turkey and allowed AKP affiliated civil society organisations to support Hamas (Efron 2018: 26).

These differing approaches to Hamas were one of the main reasons why a full reconciliation between Israel and Turkey was not concluded until 2016, some three years after Prime Minister Netanyahu's formal apology. This reconciliation agreement stipulated that Hamas's political wing would continue operating in Turkey, but its military wing activities would cease (Liebermann and Labott 2016). Turkey also backtracked on its demand that Israel should lift its territorial and naval blockades of the Gaza Strip, whilst Israel agreed to integrate Turkey in the Gaza Strip's aid architecture. Turkey's contribution would consist of construction of a hospital, the cleaning water wells, provision of fuel, construction of housing units, renovations to mosques and the provision of humanitarian aid via the Israeli port of Ashdod (Efron 2018: 27). Other agreement conditions included the transfer of some $21 million from Israel to Ankara, to establish an aid fund for the families of those killed and wounded during the IDF's raid on the Mavi Marmara. In exchange, Turkey would enact a law disallowing the filing of lawsuits against senior IDF officers and those involved in the planning and execution of the attack. The reconciliation agreement was significant in that it prompted a shift to alignment after a long period of discord. Turkey withdrew its veto on increased Israeli participation in NATO, enabling Israel to establish an office in

NATO's headquarters in Brussels (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). A series of bilateral ministerial meetings followed and Israeli tourism to Turkey increased. Finally, Turkey and Israel agreed to exchange ambassadors (Times of Israel 2016).

The foreign policy discord triggered by the fatal Mavi Marmara incident and disagreement over Hamas was not the only impediment to a shift in Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey towards alignment. Also significant was Israel's foreign policy to expand international recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, which was boosted by the election of Donald J. Trump to US president in November 2016. Turkey objected strongly and in the first major spat following the 2016 reconciliation agreement, Erdogan stated that 'each day that Jerusalem is under occupation is an insult to us', and called Israel 'racist and discriminatory', prompting official Israeli rebukes (Ahren 2017; Bachner 2018). The divergence over the status of the Israeli capital came to a head in 2018, as the Tump administration transferred the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A series of clashes erupted across the border with Gaza in response to this decision, prompting Turkey to expel the Israeli ambassador. Israel reacted by issuing marching orders to the Turkish consul in east Jerusalem, responsible for liaising with the Palestinian Authority (Bachner 2018b). This diplomatic feud ended a short-lived period of reconciliation, causing a return of Israeli foreign policy to discord, before another brief reconciliation agreement was concluded in 2022.

Throughout this period up to 2022, Israel's responses to Turkey's positions towards Hamas and Jerusalem are out of line with the notion of adverse asymmetry, which depicts Israel as courting Turkey. Also, apart from economic aspects, Israel was not willing to maintain a business-as-usual approach, amid the foreign policy rhetoric and actions pursued by the AKP-led government. This position was emphasised and reinforced by the outbreak of the 2023–2024 Israel–Hamas war, which was triggered by a series of deadly attacks by Hamas on Israeli Kibbutzim, towns and villages. According to data collated by Israel-based Institute for National Security Studies, 1200 Israelis, including elderly, men, children and women, were killed during these attacks and many women were also raped and their bodies mutilated. Since then, as of 11 November 2024, the numbers of dead and injured have risen to, respectively, 1772 and 21,744. A further 251 Israeli and foreign nationals were taken as hostages to the Gaza Strip. As of 18 November 2024, 117 have been returned or rescued alive and 34 dead hostages were recovered by the IDF. At the time of writing (November 2024), 101 hostages, including 4 from previous rounds in the conflict, remain held in captivity by Hamas and other Palestinian organisations in the Gaza Strip. Circa 143,000 Israelis across the southern border with the Gaza Strip and the northern border with Lebanon are internally displaced (INSS 2024a, b; INSS 2024b; Netanyahu 2024).

In response to the 7 October attacks, Israel launched a devastating war on the Gaza Strip. According to data published by the Hamas-run Ministry of Health in Gaza on 19 November 2024, at least 43,972 Palestinians, including 13,319 children, have been killed and more than 104,008 have been injured. In addition, 1.9 million Palestinians have been internally displaced (OCHR 2024). The IDF has assassinated almost the entire senior leadership of Hamas.

A second war front has emerged with the launch, on 8 October 2024, of cross-border attacks on Israel by the Lebanese-based Hezbollah. These attacks initially triggered ongoing border skirmishes, which have snowballed into full-blown war between Israel and Hezbollah and an Israeli ground operation in Lebanon, launched on 30 September 2024. As of 6 November 2024, an estimated 1.3 million Lebanese are displaced and more than 3000 have been killed, with the combatant–civilian ratio remaining contested (UN News 2024). Almost the entire senior leadership of Hezbollah has been assassinated. A third war front has been launched by Iran and Houthi forces in Yemen firing hundreds of cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and drones on Israel, which responded with air strikes on the Yemeni port of Hodeida and military installations in Iran and Syria.

As the war has progressed, President Erdogan has accused Israel of targeting civilians in Gaza, cancelled a planned visit to Israel and declared support for Hamas, which he describes as 'liberators' (Al Jazeera 2023a; New York Times, 2023). In another statement, Erdogan declared that 'Netanyahu is no different than Hitler' (Al Jazeera 2023b). This harsh rhetoric has been accompanied by Turkey and Israel recalling their ambassadors and President Erdogan stating that he was 'breaking off contact with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu' (Al Jazeera 2023c).

The measures taken by Turkey have rendered Israel's foreign policy of alignment following the 2023c Israel–Turkey reconciliation agreement untenable and ushered in a period of a foreign policy of discord. Significantly and in contrast to what happened following the Mavi Marmara crisis and within the framework of adverse asymmetry, Prime Minister Netanyahu has not sought any de-escalation of the situation. Rather, in line with an approach towards Turkey based on equivalence, Netanyahu's response to Erdogan's accusations has exacerbated the diplomatic tensions. He maintains that 'who is committing genocide against the Kurds and holds the world record of imprisoning journalists who oppose the regime, is the last person who can preach morality to us' (Jerusalem Post 2023).

Apart from the escalating Israeli rhetoric, which reflected the shift to equivalence, Israel has proactively excluded Turkey from playing a role in resolving the Israel–Hamas war diplomatically. When the war started, Turkey's Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, proposed that a group of countries, including Turkey, should act as 'guarantor states' (Daily Sebah 2024) in Gaza. Israel ignored this proposal and opted to liaise with Qatar and Egypt as the main interlocutors with Hamas, alongside the USA. This is clear evidence of the diminished use of Turkey for Israel's regional diplomacy and is in stark contrast to the 2007–2008 heydays, when Prime Minister Olmert sought Turkey's mediation in his budding peace negotiations with Syria.

Israel has also prevented Turkey from participating in humanitarian support to the Gaza Strip, with the result that Cyprus has become the point of departure for a US-led maritime humanitarian aid corridor to Gaza. In addition, in April 2024, Israel rejected Turkey's request to parachute humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, to which Turkey retaliated by imposing restrictions on 54 items traded with Israel (YNET 2024b).

The then Israeli Foreign Minister, Israel Katz, reacted to the trade restrictions imposed by Turkey in a manner consistent with an equivalence approach rather than a position of adverse asymmetry. Rather than trying to mend fences, he stated that:

> Israel will not forebear in response to a unilateral violation of trade agreement and will take similar measures that will harm the Turkish economy. In addition, I have instructed to approach states and organisations in the United States to work towards stopping imports from Turkey and investments in Turkey, and to our friends in congress to request that they review whether the boycott laws can be breached so that sanctions are imposed on Turkey (YNET 2024b).

Subsequently Turkey has imposed a full trade ban on Israel (BBC 2024). According to Globes (2024), official statistics report that Israeli–Turkish trade plummeted by 99% in May 2024 compared to the same period last year, accounting for a total of $4.4 million. Concomitantly, Turkey's exports to Israel have declined by 38.4% or $1.42 billion since the beginning of 2024. However, whilst the effect on Israel–Turkish trade has certainly been real, these data tell only a partial story and the picture is unclear. Israeli and Turkish traders have found ways to bypass the official Turkish ban and have continued to trade; this activity is not captured in official Turkish data. Trade has been re-routed through third-party countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria and Slovenia, and some Israeli exporters have registered shipments to Palestinian companies based in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which are not affected by the Turkish ban. These goods, which must come through an Israeli port, can be transited anywhere within Israel and the OPT (Globes 2024). According to a recent publication (Middle East Eye 2024b), these clandestine methods resulted in a 423% rise in exports from Turkey to Palestine, in the first eight months of 2024 and a whopping 1156% rise in August 2024 compared to August 2023.

Thus, in the wake of the Turkish trade ban, Israel remains defiant and seems to be leaving it to the business community to find ways of bypassing the ban, rather than 'courting' Turkey—the response under adverse asymmetry. This reaction chimes with the diplomatic rhetoric adopted in response to President Erdogan's statements, Israel's rejection of Turkey's mediation services and Turkey's initiatives to become involved in the humanitarian aid provided to Gazans. These trends reflect the deepening foreign policy of discord and the consolidation equivalence as Israel's preferred foreign policy posture towards Turkey.

Shoring up equivalence: the pivot towards Cyprus and Greece

The previous sections examined the shift from contested asymmetry to equivalence between the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident and the Israel–Hamas war. What might explain the seemingly diminishing significance of Turkey for Israel in comparison to its salience during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath? One factor is Israel's pivot towards Cyprus and Greece, which has its roots in the 1990s. In that period, Greece perceived Israel's foreign policy of alignment towards Turkey, which increased its capabilities, as disrupting the balance of power in the Aegean Sea. Turkey's growing capacity was significant, given the several points of conflict

with Greece over the delineation of territorial waters, airspace, minority rights and the Cyprus issue (Ersoy 2019: 121, 127). However, the catalyst for this redirection towards the Hellenic countries was the deterioration in Israeli–Turkish relations from discord to friction within the framework of adverse asymmetry, following the fatal Mavi Marmara incident.

Thus, in August 2010, two months after the Mavi Marmara incident, Prime Minister Netanyahu made the first official visit of an Israeli prime minister to Greece (Netanyahu 2010). This followed the visit, in July 2010, of Socialist Greek Prime Minister Papandreou to Israel (Prime Minister's Office 2010). Then, in 2012, Binyamin Netanyahu became the first Israeli prime minister to visit Cyprus (New York Times 2012). In turn, Papandreou's successors, Conservative Antonis Samaras and Pro left SYRIZA Prime Minister Alex Tsipras, visited Israel in October 2013 and November 2015, respectively (Hellenic Republic Greece in the UK, 2013; Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015; Times of Israel 2015). These closer diplomatic ties are significant. They reflect Israel's intent to offset the losses incurred by the Mavi Marmara crisis by closer relations with Greece and Cyprus and their more favourable positions towards Israel in the wake of the Greek financial crisis and the 2011 Arab uprisings, which distanced the Arab countries from Cyprus. In 2016, a tripartite mechanism with Greece was introduced to facilitate multidimensional collaborations (Tzogopoulos 2023: 2–3).

These closer ties further reduced the erstwhile significance of Turkey for Israel. Diplomatically, both Greece and Cyprus could support Israel within the European Union, which, at times, has experienced tensions with Israel, especially in relation to the conflict with the Palestinians (Efron 2018: 34). Thus, from an Israeli perspective, the diplomatic significance of relations with and reliance on Turkey was waning. Also, in military terms, by allowing the IDF to join in naval and air exercises with both countries, Greece and Cyprus have filled a gap left by Israeli–Turkish discord. Since 2010, Israel and Greece have conducted joint military exercises, including *Minoas* and *Noble Dina*, and worked to achieve stronger cooperation over armaments and intelligence sharing. Also, in 2012, Israel signed a military and defence cooperation agreement with Cyprus, which allowed exchanges of classified information, IDF access to Cypriot air space and territorial waters and safeguarding of crucial energy resources (Ersoy 2019: 133; Rivlin 2019: 179). Both Israeli and Cypriot forces have trained in each other's countries and a defence export agreement, signed in June 2022, provides for the supply of protective and tactical carrying systems to the Cypriot army (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022; Tzogopoulos 2023: 4). In 2014, Israel opened a military attaché office in Athens (Ersoy 2019: 132–133).

In terms of economic relations, all three countries have worked to develop the EastMEd pipeline, an energy infrastructure to enable exports of Israeli gas to Europe, which, prior to opposition from the USA, was considered to have high potential. Nevertheless, other options for cooperation over energy have been explored. For example, Greece, Cyprus and Israel are considering cooperation related to the construction of a Euro-Asia Interconnector, a subsea cable to connect their electricity grids. It would originate in Hadera and provide cheap electricity to Europe (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2024). In addition, in 2019 Israel joined the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which has members from Egypt, Greece,

Cyprus, Italy, Jordan, Italy and the Palestinian Authority and is perceived by Turkey as a threat. Apart from bringing together several countries with strained relations with Turkey since 2011, the EMGF has potentially significant implications for Turkey's energy ambitions. The EMFG could contribute to gas drilling activities in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), specifically block 12, and could contribute also to the East Med pipeline project aimed at transporting eastern Mediterranean gas to Europe through Cyprus and Greece, which could violate Turkish Cypriot and Turkish maritime rights (Nasi 2022: 5).

Thus, the diplomatic, economic, military and energy advantages afforded to Israel by the pivot towards Cyprus and Greece are very significant since they are compensating for the benefits Turkey provided Israel in these fields in the past. Consequently, the Israeli pivot towards Cyprus and Greece has become an important pillar of Israel's engagement with Turkey based on equivalence.

Consolidating equivalence by expanding Arab–Israeli peace

The previous section shows how the pivot towards Cyprus and Greece shored up the ability of Israel to engage with Turkey from a position of equivalence. The aim of this section is to examine how the expansion of Arab–Israeli peace, through the 2020 Abraham accords, consolidated this position. To understand the conclusion of the Abraham Accords, it is helpful to briefly recount the historical context. With the election to US president of Barak Obama in 2008, the administration sought to scale down US presence in the region and announced that all US troops would be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of 2011 (The Guardian 2011). This decision marked the beginning of the end of what Hinnebusch (2014) aptly describes as a period of US hegemony in the Middle East, which began with the victory of the US-led coalition over Iraq in the 1990–91 war. Subsequent negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme, and the declared intention of the USA under Obama to redirect its efforts away from the Middle East towards Asia (Goldberg 2016), served to erode US regional hegemony.

In the context of US retrenchment in the Middle East, as Kamrava (2018: 602–604) argues convincingly, Russia scaled up its presence by intervening in the Syrian war. Its goals were to support its long-standing ally, the al-Assad regime, and retain access to its naval base in Tartus. Conversely, the European Union and China were not intent at the time on significantly expanding their influence in the Middle East amid the US retreat, which left the region with no external hegemonic power. Amid these developments, academics disagree about whether the global order was shifting from unipolarity to multipolarity (Posen 2009) or not (Brooks and Wohlforth 2023).

US retrenchment coincided with the Arab uprisings, which were sparked by the mass demonstrations that erupted in Tunisia in December 2010 and then spread to other Arab countries. Ostensibly 'strong' states, such as Libya and Syria, and weaker countries such as Yemen, collapsed and became embroiled in trans-nationalised civil wars, which caused state fragmentation, political instability and intricate security challenges. As Aran and Kutlay (2024) demonstrate, the confluence

of global systemic changes and regional developments across North Africa and the Levant prompted regional powers to pursue an assertive foreign policy, as fragmentation of the Arab states opened new 'spheres of influence' in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

The potential challenges and opportunities offered by a foothold in these spheres of influence, triggered intense competition between rival blocs, pitting powers in the Middle East against each other. For instance, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey sought to expand their influence in the region (Aran and Kutlay 2024). However, some countries saw this regional flux as a threat. For example, Bahrain, Israel, Oman and the United Aran Emirates (UAE) saw Iran's growing power and the expansion of the Jihadi threat in the form of the Islamic State (ISIS)—which, at its peak, in 2014–15, controlled some 40% of Iraq and more than 30% of Syria (Gerges 2018)—as particularly ominous. In a speech delivered to the UN General Assembly on 1 October 2013, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu described how the threats emanating from Iran and Jihadi Islamists caused convergence between certain Arab states and Israel:

> The dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran and the emergence of other threats in our region have led many of our Arab neighbours to finally recognize that Israel is not their enemy. This affords us the opportunity to overcome historic animosities and build new relationships, new friendships, and new hopes. Israel welcomes engagement with the wider Arab world. We hope that our common interests and common challenges will help us forge a more peaceful future (Netanyahu, 2013).

These stronger relations between Israel and some of the Arab states can be seen in the signing of the 2020 Abraham Accords, between Israel, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the UAE, mediated by the Donald J. Trump administration (US Department of State 2023). The accords ushered in a new era of peace between Israel and these four Arab states and were followed by Israel and the Gulf states opening embassies, direct flights between these countries, waiving of visa requirements for Israelis visiting the UAE and electronic visas for Israelis visiting Morocco and Bahrain. Also, eight months after the accords were signed, the IDF and the UAE military engaged in joint manoeuvres and Israel's political security top brass visited the Gulf to discuss security collaboration (Zalayat and Guzansky 2023:1). Finally, trade ties between Israel and the Gulf states have expanded and deepened, and in May 2021, Israel and the UAE concluded a free trade agreement. In early November, a first successful round of negotiations over a free trade deal between Israel and Bahrain was concluded (Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry 2022; Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry 2022a).

Following the November 2020 election to office of President Biden, in March 2022, the USA, Israel, Bahrain, Morrocco and the UAE held the Negev Forum with participation from Egypt, but the conspicuous absence of Turkey. The forum was attended by the foreign ministers of the six states and it was agreed that it would be convened annually and would establish working groups in various fields including health, regional security, education and tolerance, water and food security, energy and tourism. It was announced, also, that Israeli airlines would be allowed

to use Saudi Arabian air space (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA) 2023; Ben Shabbat and Aaronson 2023). Notably, these developments have continued during the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the spikes of violence between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 and August 2022 and the continuing clashes in the West Bank. The formation of Binyamin Netanyahu's extreme right-wing government in December 2022 certainly had a cooling effect on diplomatic and economic progress. However, the peace accords have remained intact and, as of the time of writing, have withstood the 2023–2024 Israel–Hamas war.

The dramatic improvement in Arab–Israeli relations achieved by the Abraham Accords was extremely significant for Israel's ability to pursue its foreign policy towards Turkey on the basis of equivalence. During most of the Cold War, until Egypt concluded a peace agreement with Israel in 1979, Turkey was one of the few Muslim-majority states that recognised Israel. Thus, in terms of Israel's international legitimacy, the relationship with Turkey was significant and reinforced the erstwhile adverse foreign policy asymmetry favouring Turkey. However, the conclusion of the 2020 Abraham Accords—which complemented Israel's peace agreements with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994)—worked to significantly reduce the historical importance of Turkey in terms of conferring regional and international legitimacy on Israel. In this respect, the expanding Arab–Israeli peace entailed by the 2020 Abraham Accords created the opportunity for Israel to deal with its regional legitimacy deficit not available during the Cold War period and in its aftermath. Thus, the expanding Arab–Israeli peace offset any legitimacy deficit entailed by the deterioration in Israel–Turkish relations, decreasing the asymmetry in foreign policy relations that, previously, had favoured Turkey.

Similarly, the conclusion of the 2020 Abraham Accords reduced the importance of the strategic advantages that relations with Turkey had provided Israel in the past, such as countering regional foes and providing areas for military training. Indeed, the responses of the Arab states to the Israel–Hamas war are in stark contrast to Turkey's confrontational public position and trade ban. Apart from Jordan and Bahrain recalling their ambassadors (Al Jazeera 2023d; Al Jazeera 2023e) in November 2023, the Arab states have not taken any real anti-Israeli measures. In fact, Jordan and the Gulf states have participated actively in defending Israel amid the barrage of more than 300 missiles and drones launched by Iran against Israel on 14 April 2024 (ABC 2024; Guardian 2024). In these terms, the 2020 Abraham Accords and especially the budding strategic ties with Bahrain and the UAE can be considered the second pillar of the policy of equivalence, consolidating the shift away from adverse asymmetry.

Reinforcing equivalence: the energy factor

An interesting feature of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey has been the decoupling of the economic and political aspects of the foreign policy dyad, until the outbreak of the Israel–Hamas war. Rivlin (2019: 179) shows that, between 2006 and 2016, bilateral trade with Turkey increased from $2.1 billion to $3.7 billion—a considerable achievement given the prolonged periods of foreign policy discord

and the sharp decline in political relations following the Mavi Marmara incident. By 2021, trade volumes had increased to $7.7 billion—following the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic—with the involvement of an estimated 3,000 Israeli and Turkish companies and an export surplus favouring Turkey (Paskin, 2022). A further 21% rise in trade volumes was reported in 2022 (Hifsh, 2023). It is significant that, in periods when Israeli exports to Turkey contracted, this was due to a decline in global energy prices, weak global trade and increased competition. In addition, although by end November 2023 bilateral trade had decreased, this cannot be linked to the effects of the Israel–Hamas war. According to Azulai (2024), the respective 19% and 32% reductions in Israeli imports from and exports to Turkey, compared with the same period in the previous year, was due to a slowdown in the world economy, currency fluctuations and Israel imported commodities previously sourced from Turkey from other, less expensive sources (Azulai 2024). Thus, until May 2024, the fluctuating Turkish–Israeli political relations were not affecting economic relations.

Nevertheless, the energy sector is influenced by political relations and is an important tool in Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey. The last section of the paper discusses how Israeli gas discoveries during the past 15 years reinforced the shift from adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey, to equivalence. Gas discoveries in Israel began just over two decades ago. The initial and relatively small Noa (1999) and Meri (2000) gas fields were supplemented by the discovery of the large and rich Tamar (2009) and Leviathan (2010) gas fields, off Israel's Mediterranean shores (Buck 2012). In 2012 and 2013, the smaller Karish and Tanin fields were discovered. These four fields, which were discovered by a private partnership between Nobel Energy and the Delek Group, provide Israel with over 830 billion cubic metres (BCM) of natural gas, 'enough to satisfy Israel's national gas demand for the next fifty years' (Retting 2021: 9). Israel also started exporting its gas, first to Jordan and then to Egypt (Lewis and Rabinovich 2020), using the Sinai to Ashkelon gas pipeline, which became operational in 2008, but has suffered periodic sabotage (Bilgin 2019: 198, 202).

Over time, Israel's gas discoveries have become a foreign policy tool. Israel has signed historic gas deals with Jordan and Egypt to strengthen the peace agreements with these two countries. The use of energy as a foreign policy instrument has resulted also in the creation of multilateral frameworks in the eastern Mediterranean basin, where Israel was keen to cooperate to exploit the potential for the area to become a new economic subregion. These efforts are in line with efforts to reduce Israel's traditional isolation in the region and establish beneficial ties with Cyprus, Greece and Turkey (Rettig 2021:10).

For instance, Israel's new-found energy resources were one of the foreign policy tools used in its negotiations over the 2016 reconciliation agreement with Turkey. Efron (2018) explains how the downing by Turkey in December 2015 of a Russian jet that violated its air space, brought to the fore Turkey's need to diversify its gas supply, which at the time was comprised of 60% from Russia and 20% from Iran. This need coincided with Israel's efforts to expand its energy export market and its option to become a key node in the gas supply chain to Europe (Efron 2018: 13–14, 19) after the signing of EEZ agreements with Cyprus in 2010 (Tzogopoulos 2023) and ratification of its agreement with Egypt.

During the 2016 reconciliation process, the first Israeli–Turkish discussions over energy were held in Istanbul, to consider the proposal of an underwater pipeline to transport natural gas from the Leviathan field to Europe. Israel and Turkey also explored the possibility of gas production cooperation and encouragement of more private companies to prospect for oil and gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey had in place a web of storage, liquefaction, marine transportation and pipeline transportation systems, to transit gas to European markets from Eurasia and the Middle East, which rendered Turkey significant for Israel's energy ambitions (Bilgin 2019: 196). The prospect of Israel–Turkey energy cooperation was boosted after Washington's announcement that it would no longer support the EastMed pipeline between Israel and Greece, for timing, price and environmental reasons (Harkov 2022). The energy factor re-emerged in the run up to the 2022 reconciliation agreement. Indicatively, energy cooperation was a central issue in the discussions between the Israeli President Yitzhak Hertzog and President Erdogan, during their meeting in Turkey on 9 March 2022. This meeting proved an important milestone in the shift from discord to alignment and the restoration in 2022 of bilateral relations (Anadolu Ajansi 2022).

Israel's gas supply side benefits and the advantages that Turkey would provide for cooperation on energy are another foreign policy domain where Israel and Turkey interact on the basis of equivalence. However, for Israel to fully exploit the potential offered by energy in this context, will require the resolution of several issues. One such is the question of quantity, as explained by a leading energy expert:

> If we are talking about liquefied natural gas through Egypt, its just 1-2 cubic meters per year in the short-term, and maybe 4-5 BCM in the long-term…if a new LNG plant is to be built by Israel, then it could be 10 BCM per year, while a pipeline to Turkey could be 10-16 BCM per year, depending on the width of the pipeline, which will be a cheaper gas than LNG (Anadolu Ajansi 2022b)

It is also not clear whether Israel would be able to use energy as a foreign policy tool amid the repeated crises with Turkey related to Israeli–Palestinian hostilities and especially in the wake of an Israel–Hamas war. Rettig (2021: 4) discusses the high level of trust required for energy collaboration, which involves loss of control over energy resources by the cooperating states. This mutual trust seems non-existent in the tumultuous Israeli–Turkish relations since 2009. Also, cooperation would need support from Cyprus for an underwater pipeline through its seabed, which would require solution to the Turkish–Greek and Turkish Cypriot problems or some type of concession or resource sharing agreement (Rivlin 2019: 189). Also, transport of Israeli gas via a pipeline or shipments of liquefied natural gas (LNG) would face competition from other supply in European gas and LNG markets (Bilgin 2019), including Russia, which could offer gas at a price that Israel could not match (Mitchell 2017). However, these limitations do not annul Israel's ability to use energy as a foreign policy tool to engage with Turkey based on equivalence. In fact, as this paper shows, these potential obstacles have driven Israel to forge regional collaborations that exclude Turkey, further reducing the historical adverse asymmetry between the two states or tilting it in Israel's favour.

Conclusion

In proposing a new analytical framework to analyse the debate on Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey, using foreign policy friction, discord and alignment, this article provides an integrative account of Israeli foreign policy towards Turkey. The empirical sections focus on the period between the aftermath of the fatal Mavi Marmara incident, which coincided with trends in the global order, the eruption of the 2011 Arab uprisings and the ongoing Israel–Palestinian conflict culminating in the erruption of the 7 October 2023 war. I have shown that prolonged periods of discord have been punctuated by shorter periods of alignment (2016–2018 and 2022–2023) and a period of acute friction following the Mavi Marmara crisis.

One of the important findings from this research is the nature of Israeli–Turkish foreign relations. The prevailing view has been that, since Turkey's recognition of Israel de facto in 1949, foreign relations between the two states have been characterised by an adverse asymmetry favouring Turkey. However, I have demonstrated in this article that the confluence of some purposeful policies pursued by Israel with global and regional changes have prompted a shift in Israel's relations with Turkey, from adverse asymmetry to equivalence.

So far, current debate overlooks the highly significant shift uncovered, traced and explained in this article. The shift began with Foreign Minister Liberman's contesting of the former adverse asymmetry stance towards Turkey, through his prioritising of 'honour' in negotiations over the Mavi Marmara incident. Concurrent changes to Israel's regional policies, such as the pivot towards Cyprus and Greece, which reduced the significance of Turkey for Israeli foreign policy, served to bolster this equivalence. Unlike Turkey, Cyprus and Greece are able to provide Israel with diplomatic support in the EU and with strategic and military assistance, previously furnished by Turkey, especially during the 1990s. Thus, the navy and air manoeuvres that were closed to Israel during periods of foreign policy discord with Turkey have been replaced by opportunities for the conduct of similar exercises with, and supply arms to, Cyprus and Greece.

The expansion of Arab–Israeli peace, in the form of the 2020 Abraham Accords, which increased the number of Israel's peace agreements with Arab states to six, is identified in this paper as another significant factor in the shift from adverse asymmetry to equivalence. Apart from reducing Turkey's significance in conferring legitimacy on Israel, the Abraham Accords involved strategic, military and economic advantages for Israel, which, in the past, were afforded to it by Turkey. This has further consolidated equivalence. Another factor is the prominence of energy in Israeli foreign policy and Israel's participation in various regional energy cooperation forums from which Turkey is excluded. These activities include the recently established EMGF and plans to construct the Euro-Asia Interconnector. In addition, Israel's gas supply side benefits and energy cooperation advantages offered by Turkey provide another basis for Israel–Turkey equivalence. The 'energy factor' has reinforced Israel's equivalence, reflected in the negotiations over the 2016 and 2022 reconciliation agreements.

It is clear that Israel has forged multiple regional ties, which have given it strategic, military, economic and legitimacy advantages that, hitherto, were in Turkey's gift. Taken together, they account for the Israeli foreign policy shift of engaging with Turkey based on equivalence rather than adverse asymmetry. In terms of foreign policy behaviour, this change has been manifested in the stance of Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel towards Turkey, during the Israel–Hamas war. Whereas immediately following the Mavi Marmara incident, Netanyahu abided by the adverse asymmetry framework that favoured Turkey, in the current Israel–Hamas war context, he has pursued a foreign policy of engaging with Turkey based on equivalence. Israel has rejected Turkey's mediation proposals and requests to become involved in provision of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and has responded defiantly to the trade ban imposed by Turkey in May 2024. This foreign policy behaviour is commensurate with engaging with Turkey based on equivalence, rather than adverse asymmetry and the courting of Turkey to try to mend fences. However, with the outcome of the Israel–Hamas war far from certain, this equivalence remains vulnerable to detrimental impacts of the war on Israel's peace agreements with Arab states, its deeper ties with the Hellenic countries and its ability to remain integrated in regional energy forums.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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