

# Fragmentation of Turkey-Israel Axis and Its Impact on Iran's Defense-Security Strategy

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## Abstract

Turkey was the first Muslim country of the Middle East that recognized Israel and established diplomatic relations with it. Before seizing power by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkish-Israel relation was described as a strategic one. Obviously Turkey's security and foreign policy has not been changed radically by the taking power of a party and all Turkish parties that have taken power have been maximizing Turkey's national interests. This article seeks explaining the impact of seizing power by AKP on changing Turkey's regional policy towards Israel. The authors assume that this change has not been in principles but in approach; an approach that has based Turkey's regional and foreign policy on a new identity construction. It means that the AKP follows combined identity constituents in its domestic and foreign policy, and on this basis, it has created some changes in its foreign policy and policy-making procedures. We can explain in this direction why Turkish-Israel diplomatic relations have diminished but not cut in a period of time. In this article, authors use constructivist pattern in order to explain the factors and emergent opportunities of this change in Iran's security and defense strategy.

**Key words:** constructivism; Turkey; Israel; Iran; AKP; Defense-security strategy

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## **Introduction**

After that Israel regime was formed, the Republic of Turkey was the first Muslim country that recognized it and consequently their strategic and diplomatic relations reached at a high level. The majority of these relations included information and security cooperation which was taken by Turkish army. The zenith of this cooperation manifested in signing several treaties for information cooperation between the two states. Israel and the West have always considered Turkey as a pathway for entering and participating in the region. On the one hand, Israel and Turkey could not establish strong ties with the region due to some reasons, particularly Israel which is not accepted yet. Therefore each of them tried to create continuous and consolidated relations with the other side so that they can play the role of an efficient player in the regional developments. On the other hand, one of the unreturned demands of the West from the regional countries has been to develop relations with Israel and guarantee it against Islamist forces.

Turkey is a country located in the Arabic region, in terms of geography, and Islamic civilization, in terms of culture and religion. But it has always tried to side with the West in terms of political and military issues. Given that secularism dominates Turkey's politics and government, the politicians have gone over the religious foundations on the basis of ties with the West and tried to define their country as a Western one. This rule of siding with the West is significant when we try to explain Turkey's stances towards Israel. Turkey has tried to exploit its relations with Israel positively or negatively. Turkey's objectives includes: create power balance with Greece through using Israel's military capabilities, maintain power balance in the region particularly with Iran, control Syria, control extremist Islamist groups through information and security cooperation with Israel, and play an active role in the regional equations particularly by mediation between Israel and Arabs. From beginning, Israel hoped that its ties with Turkey, as a Muslim country allied with the West, would pale into insignificance the religious elements that confronted Israel and Arabs.

Turkey-Israeli relations turned into coldness after seizing power by the AKP in Turkey. Representing Islamist strata of Turkey, AKP's seizing power not only affected Turkey's relations with Israel but also all political aspects of this country including domestic and foreign affairs. This article mainly focuses on answering these questions: What is the impact of

seizing power by the Turkish Islamists on the nation's regional policy towards Israel? And how does this change affect Iran's defense-security strategy?

### **Constructivist approach to foreign policy**

Constructivism is an approach that regards all human knowledge and phenomena as constructed issues which are made socially during inter-subjective interaction (Salimi, 2007: 34). Ontological debates are the most significant issues in the constructivists' system of thought. The first ontological component is the social construction of reality. Constructivists regard the issues as socially constructed. In other words, they consider normative and intellectual structures as important as material ones, even more important, in evolution of international system. Alexander Wendt believes that social structures are the products of human shared images (Aghayi and Rasuli, 2009: 3). This approach to ontological aspect, regards social realities as subjective issues which are formed by a series of rules, statements, images and so on. These concepts have been formed in particular times and places and affected by different processes so they are shaped in the existent form (Rashidi, 2010: 3).

The second component is identity. Regarding actors, constructivists believe in their social nature. It means that interactions, procedures, norms, values, culture, ideology, basic beliefs and institutionalized ideas constitute their identity (Afzali and Motaghi, 2011: 178). Identity can be defined as the definition of self against others. This definition of "self" constructs the "other" and this indicates floating and instability of identity which is one of main presumptions of constructivism (Aghayi and Rasuli, 2009: 5).

The third component is the mutual formation of agent-structure. Wendt believes that interaction is the main constituent of structures and this foundation defines actors' definition of identity and interests. Constructivism regards structure and agent as having the same importance as the other and does not prefer one over the other. From this viewpoint, actors (decision-makers) decide on the basis of norms and rules which are based in turn on a background of subjective factors, historical and cultural experience (ibid: 6). It is from this point of view that constructivism spreads to the field of foreign policy.

Constructivism considers the international relations arena neither conflicting nor cooperating but made by what states make of it (Ghavam,

1384: 7). On the basis of this perspective, state is in a context of social rules, and the rules of domestic and international environments form its identity and determine the state's interests. Constructivist analysis discusses foreign policy at domestic and international levels or both of them. In this relation, there are three levels of analysis: micro level of analysis that examines the role of domestic norms and retrospective value assignments in explaining foreign policy, macro level of analysis that emphasizes the role of transnational international shared norms, and the third level of analysis which is a combination of two previous levels. Holistic constructivism pays more attention to the third level than two previous ones. on this basis, foreign policy decision-makers decide according to existent norms in domestic and international society, and other factors also affect them within the framework of norms and subjective patterns (Moshirzadeh, 2010). These subjective patterns involve a widespread stratum from social elements and components to international norms and rules. On this basis, this article seeks to examine the role of international norms beside Turkey's foreign policy agents.

### **1. Formation of Turkey-Israel axis**

Implementing identity-building components of new Turkey (doctrine of Kamalism) presented a new image of Turkey. This domestic self-made identity which triumphed over previous identity components (Ottoman Turkey), affected Turkey's domestic and international image so that it approached the well-known international norms which in turn were imposed by the West. This issue namely commitment to international (mainly Western) norms culminated in recognizing "positive sovereignty" for this state in international arena (Yazdanfam, 2008: 765). On the other hand, Turkey also commits itself to consider regulative rules such as reception and recognition of Israel as a norm of the UN in order to gain credit and legitimacy. Through recognizing Israel as an international norm, Turkey has devolved a part of its sovereignty and obliged to considering international rules which indicates the impact of international norms on Turkey's foreign policy. Thus Turkey-Israel relations are rooted in the period of Laics and army generals' rule in Turkey and "the Turkish authorities regarded 'the peaceful relations' between the states is one of the fundamental steps forward to the realization of bilateral and multilateral interests in the region." (Erdemir, 2010: 27).

In spite of that the Western umbrella had united Turkey and Israel within the framework of the threat of communism and socialist block, however, Turkey-Israel relations were not stable and was exposed to fluctuations (Nuraldin, 2004: 263-264). Turkey has had its own reasons behind its recognition of Israel. One of the reasons for the Turkish authorities to support and recognize Israel as a 'state' was, the Turkish needs for peaceful relations with the United States in particular and Western Europe in general. The Turkish recognition of Israel as a 'legitimate state' in Palestine supported to the acceptance of Turkey as a new member to the NATO by its members (Erdemir, op. cit.: 28).

The most important reasons of constituting Turkey-Israel strategic axis include: alliance with Israel and the US in order to use their influence for entering the EU; absorbing the US financial aids; providing military and information needs particularly for facing Kurdish separatism; creating balance against the regional Arabic power; controlling Islamist currents in Turkey's domestic and abroad environment; confronting Iran's nuclear threat (Afzali, op. cit.: 116) and accessing Israel's market (Bir, op. cit.: 28).

## **2. Beginning moderate Western-Islamic policy, fragmentation of Turkey-Israel axis**

Turkish foreign policy called "Turkish Gaullism" is primarily more nationalistic and about rising Turkish self-confidence and independence (Taspinar, 2011). This is evident in the "Strategic Depth" raised by Davutoglu. He criticized Turkey's previous governments due to focusing their foreign policy only in one aspect namely the West. He acknowledged that "We will integrate Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus with Turkey as their axis and the center of world politics in future" (Saz, 2011).

The AKP seized power by emphasizing such doctrines which are nostalgically rooted in the Ottoman era. The Islamist Turkish statesmen's prospect for this kind of foreign policy is to reach Turkey to a position comparable to the Ottoman era in which a widespread influence zone is constituted. Turkey's new movements for achieving this goal include: to attempt at membership in the European Union, to try to achieve a nonpartisan position in the Middle East affairs and become a significant actors in the region, to accompany NATO in Afghanistan, to try to play an efficient role in resolving crises in Balkans and so on (Omidi and

Rezayi, 2011: 234). Even presenting a moderate model of political Islam by Turkish Islamists is an attempt at acquiring a compromised stance for expanding their influence. With this prospect, Turkey entered a coherent competition with regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

After seizing power, the AKP declared that Turkey is in a unique condition for connecting and compromising Islam, democracy and secularism. In other words, it can be said that Turkey is the only country of the Middle East that may interact with contradictory states like Iran, Israel, the US, Arabs and Europe, and this is regarded as Turkey's soft power and few countries enjoy such a potential (*ibid.*, 244). Thus affected by the adopted procedure by Islamist statesmen, Turkey has depicted a huge realm for its influence. Therefore Turkey needs to acquire such instruments as change in its foreign policy towards Israel (parallel with other efficient instruments) in order to refrain from negative stances against these policies by the public opinion of the Middle East.

On the one hand, beside this analytical space, many AKP leaders, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came of age among a group of Islamist politicians who voiced intense hostility to Israel (I. C. G, 2010: 2). In fact, the Islamists who gained power on the basis of moderate Islamism had to decorate the identity of their country with both Islamic and western features which can be seen in the combined strategy of look to east and west (see: Cornell, 2012). Compared to 1990s, Turkey decreased its relations with Israel in direction of adjustment strategy. On the other hand, strategic necessities that made Turkey to establish close ties with Israel have lost their significance. One of these necessities is the kind of interaction with Iran. Turkey and Iran have reached a high level of integration regarding security issues such as the Kurdish question and separatist groups like PKK and PJAK, Iraq and the threats of Kurdistan Regional Government, Islam World issues, particularly the Palestine question (Rezazdeh, 2009: 124-138). Consequently Turkey-Syria relations have also changed because now Turkey looks at Syria and their common issues not from the West's view but from its regional and native point of view which is different from previous periods.

Beside mentioned signs, there are other signs indicating that in this period of time, the AKP's policy has been a moderate one: Erdogan's reaction to Israel's invasion on Gaza and Rafah, criticizing Israel's influence in the Kurdistan Regional Government (Raptopoulos, 2004: 11), deepening ties with Hamas, condemning Israel's attack on Lebanon

in summer 2006, suspending military exercises in 2009 following Israel's repressive operation against the Gaza Strip (I. C. G., op.cit: 3). If the AKP adopted a pro-Palestine and anti-Israel policy, it would face domestic problems (questioning its legitimacy by military and laic parties) on the one hand and foreign problem (decreasing the West's economic and military aids) on the other. Thus the AKP's foreign policy has been fluctuated between pro-Palestine and pro-Israel trends.

Thus it can be said that tensions between Turkey and Israel in this period within the dominant norms of Turkish foreign policy do not mean to deny Israel's legitimacy but they mean to protest Israel's performance and to correct it. The reason for this claim is that these tensions have never culminated in a serious crisis cutting their relations. The definition of Turkey's identity on a mixed basis has caused that this state's politics be influenced by both Western and Islamic norms and manifested a character which is the result of this identity combination. In fact, Turkey's policy based on strategic alliance with Israel and approaching Islamic countries have been accompanied by a kind of moderatism that gives Turkish Islamism a particular and unique nature in the Islam World.

According to constructivist analysis, institutional, normative, historical, geographical and ideological rules and procedures have an evident impact on identity definitions and consequently on actors' objectives, interests and actions. The doctrine of strategic depth is a foundation based on historical and geographical norms that form Turkey's mixed identity. On the basis of this doctrine, Turkey has to have an active interaction with all regional neighboring systems (Murinson, 2006: 948). The policy of multi-regionalism indicates that Turkey redefines its identity and meaning system because its activism towards threats and challenges in direction of its interests is dependent on identity redefinition so that this state will have more harmony with other actors, particularly its neighbors. According to this constructivist rationale, Turkey has to provide a more Islamic definition of its identity so that it balances its laic aspect. Establishing balance in Turkey's regional policy on the basis of moderate Islam can weaken Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis that affects Iran more than any other regional actor.

Turkey-Israel relations in the examined period of time is in a vague situation but it is obvious that their relations has turned into coldness compared to pre-AKP era because Turkey's behavioral obligations has changed due to redefinition of its identity which has culminated in

fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis. The most important obligations are as follows: (1) establishing balance in relations with Arabs and Israel in direction of strategic depth doctrine and multi-regionalism strategy and revitalizing Ottoman authority, (2) changing attitude towards Iran as a previously common threat, (3) changing attitude towards the Kurds in direction of interaction with domestic and abroad Kurds, (4) solving Cyprus question and improving relations with Greece in direction of zero-problem with the neighbors, (5) interaction with Arabs in order to access to their huge resources of energy and their populous consumption market. Turkey's annual trade with the Arab world now stands at US\$ 30 billion, compared to less than US\$ 2 billion a decade ago (Nibllet, 2010: 14), (6) attempting at controlling and using the regional revolutions and preventing from Iran's influence and Shiite groups such as Lebanon Hezbollah, (7) responding to public opinion.

Given these factors, it can be said that Turkey is seeking a balanced and moderate relationship with the dominant regional identities namely Arabs and Israel. In direction of preserving and reinforcing the Western component of Turkish identity and its accompanied norms, the AKP's officials have always declared that they will not cut Turkey's ties with Israel. Identity obligations are major parts of Turkey's priorities of national interests and as far as these relations are useful for Turkey, there is no reason for cutting them. In this context, the most significant reasons for not cutting the bilateral relations are as follows: using Israel as a lever for controlling Iran and Syria; persistence of the US and NATO financial and military aids; joining the European Union; preserving domestic legitimacy through accompanying Turkey's laic political system obligations.

Consequently the AKP's pattern that has accepted the Western secularism and civilization, on the one hand, and respects Islamic traditions, on the other, actually is a combination that makes peaceful coexistence with the West possible and prevents from identity crisis and radicalism among Muslim groups. On this basis, among Muslim states, Turkey established the warmest relations with Israel. But at the same time, Turkey has a positive reputation among anti-Israel countries and groups including Hamas. Turkey invited Shimon Peres and Mahmood Abbas simultaneously for visiting Turkey and delivering lecture in Turkish parliament which indicates that the AKP emphasizes keep



balance in its stances toward Arabs and Israel, and play the role of mediator, instead of being accused of supporting one of the sides.

On the other hand, Israel has always prioritized its relations with Turkey as a Muslim country and there is not much probability that Turkey's recent reactions affect Israel's tendency toward continuing these ties and cutting it, particularly given the recent revolutions of the region and losing such allies as Mubarak's Egypt and also the anti-Zionist nature of most of these revolutions, Israel's need to Turkey is more evident.

### **3. Iran's security-strategic desirability as the result of Ankara-Tel Aviv fragmentation**

Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis has some security-strategic desirability for Iran which can be classified as follows:

#### **3-1 Israel's isolation and diminishing its maneuver power in the region**

Given its unique and nascent identity in the region, Israel has been shaped on the security bases, thus naturally it has provided a security-based definition of its identity and others' ones. In the approach based on security of environment, there are always some actors playing the role of threat and they are targeted in security policies. Promoting these policies is subjected to success at marshaling and regional alliance-building against threatening actor(s).

As a locked country among its enemies, Israel has sought to remove this isolation through adopting an peripheral strategy by establishing relations with non-Arab states like Turkey (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 248). Although Israel regards its evolution and existence as dependent on relations with the West, particularly the US, but it does not neglect the necessities and obligations related to its regional identity; an identity which is evidently contradicted with "common threat" resulted from its neighboring Arab and non-Arab surrounding. In such an objective and subjective space, Israel's most basic drive for military-security alliance with Turkey is to marshal against Iran and Arabs. In other words, on the basis of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, Israel made alliance with one of neighbor states against the other neighbor and prevented from making alliance against itself, on the one hand, and enjoyed upper hand against the Arabic front, particularly regarding the occupied territories, on the other. But as the result of changes at Turkey's authority level and peripheral developments such as the increase of Iran's role in Iraq since 2003 and

Israel's borders since 2006 Lebanon War, and improvement of Turkish-Iranian relations, Turkey is no longer surrounded by enemies. On this basis, two main pillars of Israel-Turkish relations i.e. common threats and common understanding about the future of the region collapsed. In the shadow of these developments, Turkey has adopted a stance between "resistance front" and "moderate front" and talked on behalf of both parties, in direction of its regional role (Labbad, 2013). Therefore naturally as the result of the fragmentation of mentioned strategic axis, Israel has been isolated in entire region by both peripheral countries and Arab ones, and its maneuver power has been diminished. Israeli leaders' warnings to American statesmen regarding Iran's increasing role and influence in the region, particularly due to its cooperation with Turkey indicate Israel's strategic limitations.

### **3-2 increasing Iran's maneuver power**

Many believe that Iran is the main winner in Turkey's changing strategy towards Israel because the subjective structure and meaning system of two states i.e. Iran and Israel are based on contradictory norms which represents them as threat against each other. Now by diminishing the position of one, the other will enjoy more security advantages. By fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis and as the result of Israel's isolation in the region, Iran's power will increase at regional and trans-regional levels. On the one hand, Iran feels its first regional and world-level enemy which had become a neighbor due to alliance with Turkey, more remote from its borders. On the other hand, Iran goes out of conflicting competition with Turkey and mutual cooperation substitutes for it. In current situation that Iran's foreign and security policy is facing many obstacles at regional and world levels (such as nuclear crisis, regional crises of Iraq and Afghanistan, cold relations with Arabs, hostility with the US and Israel, and tension with the European Union) cooperation with Turkey may decrease these tensions. Turkey's behavior pattern in regional issues such as Iran's nuclear crisis and Palestine-Israel crisis is a sign of upgrading identity and normative resemblance level between Iran and Turkey. If we add the political developments of the Arab World to this, we will witness many valuable opportunities in Iran's security-political environment that increase Iran's power of maneuver.

The prevailing view in the West is that new political-security and geopolitical developments including fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv

strategic axis, developments of Iraq and the movements of the Arab World have changed the balance in regional power and political structure in favor of Iran. Accordingly, this situation has had negative effects on the United States' strategic interests, its regional allies, particularly on Israel's position. During recent decades, preserving a balance of power policy between the regional actors has been the basis of American foreign policies in the region. This is while the recent developments have unbalanced power equations in favor of Iran (Barzegar, 2009: 28).

### **3-3 decreasing the trend and level of alliance-building against Iran**

Regional alliance-building and census-making is one of the most applied strategies of the US and Israel against Iran during past three decades. The more alliances and unifications enjoy geographical closeness, the more they are regarded as serious threats. The Turkey-Israel alliance enjoyed such a nature and function towards Iran. This alliance accelerated the trend of regional anti alliance-building because in the unsecure conditions resulted from unification and alliance of rivals and becoming a unified enemy, counter-alliance becomes the preferred strategy for targeted states. According to this rule, the counter-alliance of regional states focused on the pivot of making counter-alliances. In this direction, Tehran-Damascus axis and Arab axis were activated. It is mentionable that the Arab axis is naturally not only against Turkey-Israel ties but also has coherently targeted regional actors including Iran. While Iran is deprived of making alliance with its peripheral states, the Arab axis's alliance with the peripheral states is regarded as a security problem which is resulted from strategy and counter-strategy of alliance building in the region.

Regional conflicts appear as the result of increasing the trend and level of regional alliance and counter-alliance. Therefore by fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, the regional counter-alliances will lose their previous meaning and functional necessity. Thus the probability of happening multi-frontal conflicts and quarrels will diminish in the region.

### **3-4 upgrading the level of Iran's official playing towards Israel**

By not recognizing Israel, the Islamic Republic adopted a distinctive and unique stance at the world level; a stance which has been deprived of being accompanied by the international society. The states as the formal actors of international system have not participated in the Islamic

republic's radical stances against Israel. At the level of formal actors, the only exception is Syria that backed Iran's anti-Israel policies. Thus Iran's policy towards Israel has had several limited centers which except for Syria, the others are regarded as informal actors in international system. In other words, Iran's supporters against Israel include: Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Palestinian revolutionary groups. Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis and adopting critical challenging stances towards Israel by Turkey are more consistent with Iran's regional strategy, thus they have upgraded Iran's role towards Israel. Anti-Israeli formal role-playing which is developed as the result of Turkey-Israel strategic fragmentation is having newer aspects after recent developments of the Arab World which can be understood in the framework of Islamic geo-culture.

#### **4. Iran's security-defense strategy towards Israel**

The aforementioned strategy has some valuable opportunities for Iran's security-defense strategy. The appropriate use of new situation requires planning and implementing a defense strategy which is consistent with Iran's security conditions and also the region.

##### **4.1 resistance defense strategy**

Iran's most basic defense strategy towards Israel has been resistance and formation of a type of resistance identity. As pointed out before, anti-Israel resistance has been operationalized by Iran-Syria axis and regional informal actors. Resistance is a type of multi-faceted strategy. According to a simple definition "resistance culture is a kind of life and thought which is defined and determined by resistance against Israel as an occupier. In resistance discourse, all individual and social behaviors and practices are defined within the framework of "resistance" and "struggle" as master-signifier. In this culture, struggling against Israel is not only a national task but a divine and religious duty" (Dehghani Firouzabadi, 2007: 57-92).

By banishing Turkey from Israel's regional stances, fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis caused weakening the peace and compromise discourse and dominating resistance discourse in Arab-Israel conflict. Reinforcing Islamism, spreading resistance discourse and weakening peace discourse culminated in reinforcing and upgrading the position and role of those forces and states that do not recognize Israel's existence.

These developments mean that the strategic balance has been changed in favor of Israel's enemies and against Israel and the US. Consequently Iran's resistance-oriented stances which are now accompanied by Turkey have been reinforced, although Turkey's stances are more or less different from Iran's. The spread of resistance as a norm in the region has culminated in formation of a resistance identity that will trigger actors to defend their national and ideological interests. Islamic resistance is not only a defensive or aggressive military-political combat, but a combat with an ideological, religious and cultural nature. Thus defending Muslims through anti-Israel resistance which is regarded as Iran's basic strategy experiences a new era as the result of Turkey's banishing from Israel and change in regional marshal.

#### **4-2 cooperationist defense strategy**

Type and quantity of similarity and dissimilarity among regional actors' security perceptions depict a spectrum of defense strategies against threat sources that include from cooperation to conflict. As an organizer of a sort of regional identity in terms of security, cooperationism is realized when the efficient regional actors enjoy similarity and resemblance in their meaning system and security perception. "In geographical spheres in which there are signs of strategic interests, rivalry among regional actors and great powers is inevitable." (Motaghi, 2010: 269). In such circumstances, the regional actors should have a similar perception towards the role and necessity of foreign great actors in the region so that they can proximate their regional and international views to each other and reach a balance point. Fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv reinforced this perception that it is better to solve regional problems on the basis of regional realities and solutions. After the developments of the Arab World, this trend of regionalism has been more focused on.

The cooperationist approach of Iran and Turkey within the framework of bilateral participation has a significant role in regional multilateral participation (security regionalism). Changing Turkey's strategic policy towards Israel indicates that Ankara has adopted a maximum-oriented look to the Middle East and Islam World in the direction of reinforcing regional identity and consequently, its own regional and world role. As the result of this change, Turkey has abandoned pro-Western camp and chosen strategic participation with Iran (Inbar, 2011: 143). Turkey's

cooperation with Iran challenges Israel and the US's policies towards Iran and Iran-related issues such as its nuclear program. Turkey's current stance culminating in adopting such policies as refusing support additional sanctions against Iran (March and June 2010) allows Iran to become more immune to economic pressure and enhances Iranian power in the region (*ibid.*). Ankara-Tehran axis which was regarded as a threat by Arab states has faced a different regional approach as the result of 2011 developments in the political space of the region. On this basis, in the current regional situation, multilateral and bilateral participation (on the pivot of Turkey) in the shadow of regional identity leanings is Iran's most basic defense strategy against international society (led by the US and Israel) so that it can decrease its security vulnerability.

#### **4-3 balance-oriented defense strategy**

Balance of power is traditional security norm in the Middle East. Iran-Iraq, Iran-Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia-Egypt have been the poles of this traditional system. Since 1990, by formation of Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis and its fragmentation since 2003, a new normative formation of power balance shaped in the region which got more complicated as the result of adding Turkey to the strategic equations. During 1990s, the region witnessed a bipolar power balance system in which each pole was consisted of two allied actors: the first was Israel-Turkey axis and the other was Iran-Syria axis (Figure 1). After the fragmentation of the first axis, a new three-polar balance of power system has emerged consisting of Turkey, Israel, and Iran-Syria (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: regional balance of power system 1990s**

Turkey-Israel (alliance) ←————→ Iran-Syria (counter-alliance)

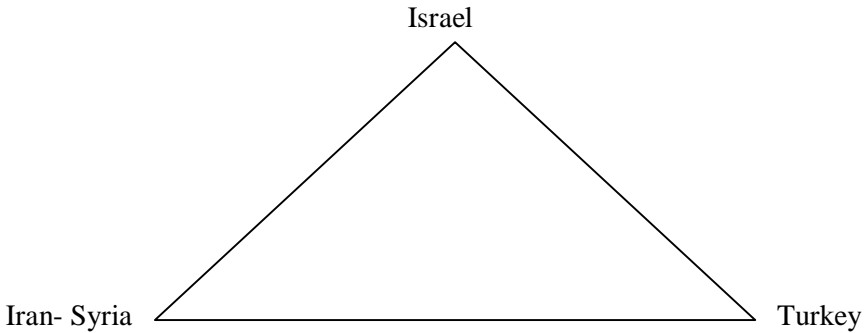
**Figure 2: regional balance of power system 2003 onward**

Figure 1 indicates a kind of balance of power system that makes it difficult for Iran to handle security-strategic challenges. By fragmentation of Ankara-Tel Aviv axis, Turkey-Syria relations upgraded to a strategic participation. Therefore in such a situation, the traditional norm (Iran-Syria counter-alliance) loses a part of its functional necessity (Cornell, 2012: 14). Figure 2 depicts a more desirable balance of power system for Iran. Every balance of power system has its specific normative and behavioral obligation at international relations stage and on this basis, it entails competition which is basically leaning to cooperation or conflict. Figure 1 indicates a kind of competition leaning to conflict between Iran and Turkey and Figure 2 indicates a kind of competition leaning to cooperation and participation between the two states because Turkey plays a more constructive role in the region due to deepening its relations with Iran, Syria, Iraq and supporting Palestin and it is not merely the representative of the West's interest in the region (Rahman, 2011). Of course, it should be added that after the developments of the Arab world and changing of Turkey's stances towards Syria which is in contradiction with Iran's regional approach so this kind of balance has lost its stability.

Iran regards the formation of resistance axis as its most important achievement in the Middle East in which Syria is the focal actor. This axis provides required tools and capabilities for Iran's more widespread role at regional stage and plays a deterrent role against security threats of Iran's rivals and enemies (Vaezi, 2011: 17). As one of the main poles of regional balance of power system, Israel is regarded as the main target of

Iran's deterrence and balance-building in which Syria is located at the center. Therefore the contradiction of interests between Iran and Turkey over Syria may have harmful effects on regional power balance system.

### **Conclusion**

As a country with a unique historical background and geopolitical situation, Turkey has embarked on constructing a combined identity; an identity based on normative obligations in both domestic and foreign spaces. The Middle East consisting of Islam and West is the main normative origins of Turkey that shapes its identity. It is on this basis that the Ankara-Tel Aviv strategic axis cannot be persisted within the previous frameworks and they will encounter significant changes, changes that entail both identity and normative aspects of Turkey. Thus Turkey has put in its agenda to diminish strategic relations with Israel but not cut them. As Ankara-Tel Aviv alliance imposed a serious strategic limitation on Iran's regional policies, their fragmentation has been regarded as an achievement for Iran. In such a space, an appropriate context is provided for Iran's role-playing within the frameworks of resistance, participation and balance of power.



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