

# **The Geopolitics of Genocide in the Middle East and the Second Cold War:**

**Israeli-Turkish-American Relations and the Contested  
Memories of the Armenian Genocide (1978–1988)**



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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Eldad Ben Aharon, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Eldad Ben Aharon

Date: 22 November 2019

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates why and how Israeli diplomats leveraged the contested memories of the 1915 Armenian genocide during the last decade of the Cold War. Set against the renewed US-Soviet polarisation from 1978, and the fundamentalist coup in Iran in 1979, the thesis examines how the ‘diplomacy of genocide’ was a central component in shaping the geopolitical alliance between Israel and Turkey in the Middle East in the period between 1978 and 1988. The thesis starts from the premise that this renewed era of crisis in the last decade of the Cold War, especially in the Middle East, reinforced Turkey’s position as a vital strategic ally for Israel, just at the moment when a combination of economic and political crises had served to shift Turkey’s foreign policy towards the more anti-Israeli stance of the Arab nations.

I argue that, in this context, Israeli diplomats were under immense pressure to effect a rapid normalisation of relations. This important context can be seen as making this period in Israeli-Turkish relations the ‘decade of the Armenian genocide’. Through an in-depth study in the Israeli State Archive, (ISA) and the archives of Jewish American organisations, but also by undertaking elite oral histories that enable us to penetrate into the thought processes and decision making of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the thesis uncovers how the diplomacy related to the Armenian genocide, including within this also the memory of the Holocaust, played a crucial, but understudied, role in the triangular relationship between Israel, Turkey and the US. The thesis is divided into four sections that explore how Israel’s MFA took advantage of the emerging awareness of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in several international forums in order to court Turkey. The thesis traces the complex diplomatic manoeuvring Israel engaged in, through a variety of channels, to support Turkey’s denial of the 1915 Armenian genocide, especially in the US. Furthermore, the thesis shows how this support of Turkey’s narrative denying the Armenian genocide also served the Israelis well by protecting Jewish interests in Muslim countries in the Middle East. Among these interests was protecting the ‘singularity’ of the Holocaust as a unique event in human history.

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## Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AIPAC	The American Israel Public Affairs Committee
ASALA	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia
CMHR	Canadian Museum for Human Rights
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
DECA	Cooperation on Defence and Economy Agreement
EEC	European Economic Community
ETA	<i>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</i>
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IGSS	Israeli General Security Service [ <i>Ha-Shabak</i> or <i>Sherut Bitachon Klali</i> in Hebrew].
IISO	Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations [ <i>Ha-Mossad</i> in Hebrew]
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISA	Israeli State Archive
JCAG	Justice Commandos Against Armenian Genocide
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MP	Members of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NILI	<i>Netzah Yisrael Lo Yeshaker</i> in Hebrew [in English: Eternity (God) of Israel will not lie]
OHA	Oral History Association
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
TNIO	Turkish National Intelligence Organisation [ <i>Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı</i> , MİT in Turkish].
UNGC	United Nations [UN] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
USHMC	United States Holocaust Memorial Council
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
WATS	Workshop for Armenian / Turkish Scholarship
WJC	World Jewish Congress
WOJAC	World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

## **Chronology of Political Events**

- 1979**            1 February: Iran Fundamentalist Revolution.
- 1979**            24 December: Soviet Union invades Afghanistan
- 1980**            30 July: the 'Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel' ratified in the Israeli Parliament.
- 1980**            6 September: the 'liberation of Jerusalem demonstration' takes place in the city of Konya, Turkey.
- 1980**            12 September: Turkish military coup.
- 1981**            13 December: Polish authorities impose martial law after a failed attempt to liberate the Polish workers.
- 1982**            4 June: attempt by Palestinian terrorists to assassinate the Israeli Ambassador in London, Shlomo Argov.
- 1982**            6 June: IDF invades Lebanon in 'Operation Peace for Galilee'.
- 1983**            6 November: civil elections in which Turgut Özal is elected as the new Turkish Prime Minister, marking the end of the military regime.
- 1985**            24 April: 70th Anniversary of the Armenian genocide
- 1986**            1 December: Turkey makes its first formal application to the European Economic Community EEC.
- 1987**            18 June: European Parliament Armenian Resolution accepted, Strasbourg.
- 1987**            4 August: House Joint Resolution 132, Armenian genocide Bill rejected by the American Congress.

*For Louise and the boys ...*

# **PART I:**

## **INTRODUCTION**

# Chapter 1

## Problematising Israel's Policy on the Armenian Genocide

*“Israel, the state of the Jewish people who has suffered more than any other people from persecutions and oppression, is very sensitive to the suffering of the Armenian people.[...] There are things that are above diplomacy. Holocausts of other peoples are a clear case of this category.”*

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, 23 October 1989 <sup>1</sup>

This thesis investigates why and how Israeli diplomats leveraged the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in the last decade of the Cold War. Specifically, the thesis proceeds from the basis that the late 1970s and early 1980s marked a critical period of changing alliances in the Middle East, changes that were given additional significance due to the Cold War context and the particular strategic significance of the Middle East in that conflict. Early 1979 saw the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord at Camp David, but also, shortly thereafter, a fundamentalist Islamic coup in Iran; both events that destabilised the Cold War geopolitical alliances. In the midst of these events was Turkey, then, as now, an atypical North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (hereafter NATO) member in a uniquely strategic and vulnerable position, and then, as now, facing economic and political crises, alongside concerns that, despite the secular tradition of the Kemalists, it too could be engulfed by the Islamist forces that had been unleashed so spectacularly in Iran. Set against this unsettled context, after almost 70 years of international silence, a campaign for recognition of Turkey's role in the genocide of Armenians in the closing stages of WWI emerged on the international stage. The intersection of this campaign with the unstable situation in the Middle East posed significant challenges, but also opportunities for Israeli and Turkish diplomats, each of whom sought to leverage it for their diplomatic ends.

It is this set of circumstances that informs the research question of this thesis: why and how did Israeli diplomats leverage the contested memory of the Armenian genocide in the last decade of the Cold War? This question can be broken down to six

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<sup>1</sup> Protocols of the Knesset, November 8, 1989 cited in: Yair Auron, *The Banality of Denial: Israel and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 110.

sub-questions: firstly, what were the historical circumstances that undermined Israeli-Turkish relations in the last decade of the Cold War? Second, what role did these circumstances play in shaping Israel's attitude towards the contested memories of the Armenian genocide during that period? Third, what role did the geopolitics of the Middle East and the renewed East-West arms race play in shaping Israel's approach to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide? Fourth, to what extent did the attempt to link the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide as integrated history shape Israel's policy? Fifth, what role was played by both American Jewish organisations and the Turkish elite in the development of Israel's policy in respect to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide? Lastly, set against the protection of Jewish lives and interests, how and why did considerations of morality inform Israeli diplomatic behaviour in respect to the recognition of the Armenian genocide?

Almost three decades have passed since Yair Auron published his first book on the *Yishuv* and Zionist movements' reaction to the Armenian genocide during the British mandate in Palestine.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, Auron published his second book, which examined the Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide since 1948. Both were published in Hebrew and English and later translated into several other languages. The second book was mainly an initial scoping of this important and contested topic.<sup>3</sup> The importance of Auron's research lay in making the topic accessible to readers and in creating an initial scholarly debate, and in that sense this thesis is built upon Auron's work. That said, as the literature review shows, there remains much unbroken ground to cover and several important perspectives have been neglected. It is the exploration of these issues that makes this thesis an original contribution to the understanding of Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide.

Auron's work has been valuable in exposing Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide to the Israeli public, media and academia. Given that the 1915 genocide has not been included in Israeli history textbooks and curricula, it is not surprising that much of the Israeli public is not well informed about the 1915 Armenian genocide.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the perception is that Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide has been

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<sup>2</sup> *Yishuv* or *Ha-Yishuv* is a Hebrew phrase that refers to the Jewish community settled in mandatory Palestine under Ottoman and, subsequently, British rule.

<sup>3</sup> Yair Auron, *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publications, 2000); Auron, *The Banality of Denial*.

<sup>4</sup> Auron, *The Banality of Denial*. Yona Weitz, *Memory in the Shadows of Genocide: The Memory of the Armenian Genocide in the Armenian Community in Jerusalem*, (Ph.D thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2010), 98 [in Hebrew].

influenced by foreign policy and political considerations over the years, specifically its historical strategic vulnerability in the Middle East and the need for a strong alliance with Turkey, the biggest Muslim country in the region.

Another factor is the common perception among the Israeli public that the Holocaust is ‘unique’, and the desire among Israeli policymakers, especially Yad Vashem historians to reinforce that uniqueness.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most powerful expression of this policy can be found in the words of the then Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quoted at the outset of this thesis. Netanyahu used vocabulary which emphasised Israel’s, and the Jewish people’s sympathy with Armenians. In referring to “the Holocaust of other peoples” and “suffering”, it aimed to explain to the Israeli Members of Parliament (hereafter MP) and to the public that there are things that are “beyond diplomacy”.<sup>6</sup> Reading this quotation of Netanyahu’s, it seems like a genuine and thoughtful Israeli policy, indicating that the MFA should be regarded as supportive of remembering the Armenian genocide. As the thesis will show, Netanyahu, who personally was involved behind the scenes in Israel’s politicisation of the Armenian genocide, as described in chapters four to eight, was very well informed about Israel’s manoeuvring in respect to the Armenian genocide when giving this speech in the Israeli Parliament. The actions that the MFA undertook at key moments of the decade will cast more light on Netanyahu’s words, revealing them to be cynical and even misleading.

This thesis seeks to situate Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide within a series of neglected contexts: late Cold War history, Middle Eastern studies, Holocaust and genocide studies and oral history. Through an in-depth study undertaken in the Israeli State Archive (hereafter ISA), the archives of Jewish American organisations, and by undertaking elite oral interviews with Israeli, Turkish and American diplomats, the thesis demonstrates how the Armenian genocide shaped the triangular relationship between Israel, Turkey and US in the overarching context of great power politics during the last decade of the Cold War.

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<sup>5</sup> Thus even when the Armenian genocide is mentioned efforts are made to distinguish it from the Holocaust. See, for example how Yehuda Bauer argued in several interviews in the Israeli media during the 1990s along the lines that: “there is no contradiction saying that the Holocaust was a unique genocide without any precedent in human history and saying that there have been other cases of genocides, among them the Armenian genocide.” 24 June 1997, [in Hebrew], cited in: Weitz, “Memory in the Shadows of Genocide,” 164.

<sup>6</sup> Auron, *The Banality of Denial*, 110.



## The Argument

A question raised by many Cold War experts is: ‘what was the Cold War all about?’<sup>7</sup> Most agree the East–West rivalry of the Cold War spanned a number of conceptual frameworks such as collective regional and international security, the interpretation of human rights values, cultural norms and the possibility of a nuclear war.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on the first and second frameworks, in this thesis I argue that, in the context of the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations of the late 1970s, changing alliances in the Middle East, and the renewed Cold War security dilemma of the early 1980s, Israeli diplomats sought to leverage the contested memories of the Armenian genocide as an issue of shared concern with Turkey and the US. In this context, Israeli diplomats were under immense pressure to effect a rapid normalisation of relations. Given that core elements of the bilateral ties between Ankara and Jerusalem were revoked by Turkey’s MFA during this period, including the freezing of any cultural and economic exchanges, the emerging memories of the 1915 genocide were the only lever available to the Israeli diplomats to restore relations. This important context can be seen as making this period in Israeli-Turkish relations the ‘decade of the Armenian genocide’.

To this end, Israeli diplomats regularly raised the spectre of the ‘apocalyptic scenario’ of Turkey following through on its leaders’ threats to leave NATO if the Armenian genocide were to be acknowledged by NATO members, specifically the US. On the other hand, this took place against the background of the 1973 Helsinki process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (hereafter, CSCE), which had underlined human right norms as the common good. The peak of that process was the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accord, which emphasised how human rights norms are linked to international security.<sup>9</sup> The irony was that, although the Americans emphasised human rights values as a core foreign policy goal, from the mid-1970s to

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<sup>7</sup> See for example: Olav Njølstad “Introduction: The Cold War in the 1980s”, in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde, “Editors’ Introduction”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–13; Odd Arne Westad “The Cold War and the International History of the Twentieth Century”, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 1, 1–19.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Keys and Roland Burke, “Human Rights”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 494. See also the extensive literature on the CSCE, for example Gottfried Niedhart, “CSCE, the German Question, and the Eastern Bloc,” *Cold War Studies* 18, No. 3 (2016): 3–13.

the early 1980s, Washington, and then Jerusalem, seem to have adopted a different interpretation when it came to Turkey's genocidal past. It should be noted here that it is accepted that although the abuses that the Ottoman Armenians suffered in the past were human rights abuses at the time they were committed, the recognition by a state in the present day of those historic crimes is not a human rights issue per se. Nonetheless, the argument here is that, from a moral perspective, the recognition of past crimes by a contemporary state is a component in building its 'soft power'.<sup>10</sup> In that respect, the recognition, or otherwise, of events as significant and horrific as the 1915 genocide, must still be seen as representing a powerful statement of states' position vis à vis human rights.<sup>11</sup>

Part of the argument that the thesis puts forward is a detailed analysis of why the Israeli MFA chose to act in the specific ways that it did, thereby exploring the complicated geopolitical order which drove Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide. In that context, the question of the extent to which morality informed Israeli diplomatic strategies needs to be understood within the context of a broader question, familiar in Jewish history, about Jewish particular interests versus universal morality and human values.

The predominant explanation of Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide by Auran and other commentators, such as Israeli politicians and journalists, has been that the importance of maintaining relations with Turkey drove Israel—during almost four consecutive decades—to avoid recognition of the 1915 genocide. Another frequently-used interpretation has been the Israeli and Jewish need to protect the singularity of the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Engaging with these positions, in this thesis, I trace Israel's attitude to the Armenian genocide, building on Auran's focus on the importance to Israel of relations with Turkey, but focusing in great detail on a specific key period distinguished by the coincidence of a renewed intensity in the Cold War, heightened instability in Israel's

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<sup>10</sup> 'Soft Power' is a term that has been developed by Joseph S. Nye. According to Nye 'Soft power' serves as a means to achieve foreign policy objectives without the need for economic buyouts or the use of arms, but only by implementing humanitarian values and cultural norms. See Joseph, S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Lorena De Vita, "Overlapping Rivalries: the two Germanys, Israel and the Cold War," *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (2017): 351–66; Lily Gardner Feldman, "The Principle and Practice of 'Reconciliation' in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic," *International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1999): 333–56; Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012). On reparations and apologies, see John Torpey, *Making Whole What has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Auran, *Banality of Denial*.

relations in the Middle East, and the reinvigoration of the 'Armenian question'. Speaking in terms of continuity and change, given that the current (2019) Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide both by the parliament and by MFA is consistent since the 1980s, it makes the investigation of the period in question even more significant. Therefore, it is that combination of factors that makes the key moments of this decade more significant than subsequent periods.

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis consists of four parts: the first chapter of the literature review surveys a number of key debates that intersect with the thesis' premise. Firstly, given that much of the thesis concentrates on Israeli-Turkish relations in the last decade of the Cold War, the literature review focuses closes on the historical relations between Jerusalem and Ankara. Subsequently, the review analyses the Armenian genocide and the literature on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The review discusses recent trends and key publications and identifies research questions relevant to the thesis. In the last section of this chapter, the review examines key publications and trends in Israel's foreign policy, especially in respect to Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide. The second chapter of part one focuses broadly on methodology. This chapter serves to place the thesis within the framework 'diplomacy of genocide', as well as the existing research into the history of the late Cold War and the Middle East. Lastly, this section discusses the scope of the thesis including the empirical sources and the elite oral history element of that methodology.

In the empirical chapters, the core argument of the thesis is developed in three main parts. The second part of the thesis charts Israeli-Turkish relations in the context of the last decade of the Cold War and US influence in the Middle East. This provides a baseline historical framework that the subsequent two parts of the thesis revisit in more detail. Central to this period is the crisis in relations between 1980 and 1985, which frames the historical timeline of the whole thesis and provides a clear understanding of what drove the Israeli MFA to leverage the memory of the Armenian genocide into a diplomatic strategy to approach Turkey and ultimately to restore relations. This period is broken into two chapters: the third chapter traces the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations in the context of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and Turkey's social, energy and economic crisis between 1978 and 1980. This deep crisis triggered a

military coup which stopped the chaos but led to a period of frozen Israeli-Turkish relations during which the emerging Armenian campaign was used for several diplomatic ends revolving around late Cold War diplomacy. In parallel to these events was the renewed tension between the Americans and the Soviets that spanned from 1979 to 1985, sometimes known as the Second Cold War. This period was characterised by intense efforts by the Cold War superpowers to shape the new Middle East after the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Israeli diplomats used those Cold War fears to seek a rapprochement with Turkey, using the argument that strong Israeli-Turkish relations were in the interests of the Americans in the 'new' Middle East. The historical trends in this chapter are underpinned by two specific events related to the Armenian campaign: Armenian terrorism, which reached a peak in 1982–83, and the 1982 Holocaust and genocide conference in Jerusalem.

The fourth chapter, meanwhile, studies the gradual normalisation of the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem (1985–1988). This period was characterised by more intensified Israeli/Jewish efforts to prevent the Armenian genocide from being recognised in local and international forums (e.g. in the US Congress, through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM) and in the parliament of the then European Economic Community (hereafter EEC). This chapter also reviews Turkey's first application to join the EEC, made in late 1986, which, along with other changes in Turkey's foreign policy, provide useful background for an assessment of the third part of the thesis, which focuses more on the later years of the Armenian campaign. All in all, the first part of the thesis gives the reader the fundamental historical background to follow the subsequent more detailed analysis of the central events in that story.

The third part of the thesis begins with the fifth chapter, which studies the implications of the Armenian terrorism targeting Turkish diplomats between 1979 and 1987. The terror attacks by militant Middle Eastern Armenian groups were the first signs of an international campaign by the Armenian diaspora to awaken the international community to the forgotten 1915 Armenian genocide. This campaign forced Turkey to face allegations of genocide for the first time since it was perpetrated during the WWI, and provoked Turkish attempts to establish and implement a counter-narrative of denial, and vigorous advocacy against the Armenian terrorists. Set against the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations, this violent campaign offered Israeli diplomats an initial opportunity to approach Turkey's military elite. Israel, experienced in the fight

against Palestinian terrorism, found in this a useful means to court a Turkish military elite who had fostered counter-terrorism as Turkey's highest priority.

The sixth chapter of the thesis examines the Holocaust and genocide conference that took place in Jerusalem in 1982, focusing specifically on the vigorous pressure exerted by Israel's MFA for the conference to remove six panels on the Armenian genocide planned as part of this event. The core reason for these efforts was concern that such a discussion would have a negative impact on the already frozen Israeli-Turkish relations and on the MFA's efforts to restore those relations through shared counter-terrorism activity. An additional aspect in this dilemma was the status of Jewish communities in Syria and Iran which were threatened at that time thanks to the emergence of Hafez al-Assad's military dictatorship in Syria and the fundamentalist regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. In this context, Turkey had given implicit signs that if the conference took place, Jews fleeing the above regimes would be returned to their countries. Since Turkey was the only viable escape route for Jews in these countries, Israel's executive forces did not want to jeopardise this complicated operation. The Israeli effort regarding the conference in Jerusalem and the shared counter-terrorism strategy proved to Turkey's MFA, although they did not say this explicitly at first, that Israel and the Jewish world would support Turkey's denial of the genocide in the future if Israel's vital interests were felt to be in jeopardy, and that Israel saw good Israeli-Turkish relations as one of those vital interests.

The fourth and final part of the thesis studies the politics of the Armenian genocide resolutions in the European Parliament and the United States Congress, as well as of the USHMM. The seventh chapter studies the US 'campaign to remember' the Armenian genocide. It shows how the Turks used Israeli diplomats and Jewish American organisations in an attempt to pressure the USHMM commission to exclude references to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide from the Holocaust museum. The Turkish and Israeli pressure took place in the context of contested views of the direction of US foreign policy in respect to the degree of emphasis on human rights between the Carter and Reagan administrations. When it came to Turkey and its importance to NATO, the Reagan administration showed a stronger commitment to Cold War collective security than to the human rights dimension of Turkey's genocidal crimes. This unfolds neatly into the eighth and final chapter of the thesis, exploring how the different outcomes of the Armenian genocide resolutions in the European Parliament and the United States Congress reflected the Western bloc's contested views

of the Helsinki Accords and Turkey's strategic importance to the alliance. In both chapters, the deep concerns with Israel's MFA about the potential for Turkey to leave the NATO alliance played an important role in their efforts to help Turkey to confront the genocidal accusations, thus helping to restore Israeli-Turkish relations. All in all, the four parts of the thesis work together to present a detailed assessment of how the interrelations between Turkey's domestic difficulties, Israel's desire for good relations with Turkey, Cold War security concerns, instability and changing alliances in the Middle East, and terrorism all worked together to explain Israel's surprising position vis à vis the Armenian genocide.

### **Terminology: The 'Armenian Question' versus the Armenian Genocide**

Before tapping into the literature, a short yet necessary note on terminology. Donald Bloxham and Fatma Müge Göçek have sketched the historiography of the events of 1915 into two opposing camps. The first is the 'denialist' camp; those works affiliated mainly, although not exclusively, with Turkish nationalist historiography, which argues that the events of 1915 were not genocidal by intent but an unintentional destruction of Armenians due to sickness and deportations.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the second group is what Bloxham and Göçek identify as 'Western historiography'. This body of work is referred to by the international community and is approved of by Armenian survivors and the diaspora communities. These works argue that the events of 1915–1923 were indeed genocidal and entailed the systematic destruction of the Ottoman Armenians.<sup>14</sup> Bloxham and Göçek also discuss the development of the historiography of both these camps; referring to a few phases in the development of that historiography, with the most relevant for this chapter being the 'fourth phase' during the 1970s and 1980s. This phase of the historiography emerged due to a growing interest in Holocaust and genocide studies and due to the assassinations perpetrated by

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<sup>13</sup> Donald Bloxham and Fatma Müge Göçek, "The Armenian Genocide," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 344. For more on recent works from the denialist section, most of them publications of the University of Utah Press, see for instance: Yücel Güçlü, *Armenians and the Allies in Cilicia, 1914–1923* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010); Justin McCarthy et al., *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Bloxham and Göçek, "The Armenian Genocide," 345. For further debate on this division see Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), xvi.

the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (hereafter ASALA) and the Justice Commandos Against Armenian genocide (hereafter JCAG).<sup>15</sup> This point is expanded in what follows.

By contrast, an examination of the work of the denialist camp reveals that since the 1980s the Republic of Turkey has referred to the Armenian genocide as the ‘Armenian question’.<sup>16</sup> Examining the Armenian political violence against the Turkish republic in the 1970s and 1980s has been an area of study hitherto occupied exclusively by Turkish scholars. Scholars such as Taner Akçam and Yılmaz Öztuna have studied the Turkish authorities’ initial response to the Armenian political violence against the Turkish republic in the 1970s and 1980s. Within this body of scholarship, work by Doğan Gürpınar, Tunç Aybak, Fatma Müge Göçek and, more recently, the American political scientist Jennifer Dixon, has highlighted the importance of the military coup of 1980 for the establishment of a centralised control over the Turkish denial narrative.<sup>17</sup> Among the measures undertaken during the early 1980s, was the institutionalising of a narrative defending the genocidal crimes of the Young Turks.<sup>18</sup> Untrained historians, such as diplomats and state officials, Kamuran Gürün and Esat Uras, have published books on the Turkish narrative.<sup>19</sup> In this specific context, Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen and Robert Jay Lifton have demonstrated in their work that the Institute of Turkish Studies, located in Washington, D.C., which was financially sponsored by the Turkish government, was closely involved in writing studies that supported the denialist narrative.<sup>20</sup>

This thesis does not offer any fresh interpretations of or new evidence in respect to the disputed history between the perpetrator state and the victim group. Rather, the thesis is positioned within, and acts as a contribution to, the Western historiography that sees the events of 1915 as genocide according to the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (hereafter

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 352–53.

<sup>16</sup> The Turkish phrase is ‘*Ermeni Sorunu*’.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer M. Dixon, “Defending the Nation? Maintaining Turkey’s Narrative of the Armenian Genocide,” *South European Society and Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010): 467–85; Doğan Gürpınar, “The Manufacturing of Denial: The Making of the Turkish ‘Official Thesis’ on the Armenian Genocide Between 1974 and 1990,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 3 (2016): 217–40.

<sup>18</sup> Dixon, “Defending the Nation?,” 467–85; Tunç Aybak, “Geopolitics of Denial: Turkish State’s ‘Armenian Problem,’” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18 no. 2 (2016): 125–144.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (London: Rustem, 1985); Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (Istanbul: Documentary Publications, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

UNGC). For these reasons, the thesis consistently uses the term Armenian genocide, rather than the ‘Armenian question’.

### **Mapping the Historiography: Israeli-Turkish Relations**

This section assesses the challenges, promises and dynamics of the historical relations between the two countries. Given the extensive scholarship on the countries’ relations, the most effective way to survey the literature is to examine it by periods. In this regard, Israeli-Turkish relations are divided into four periods: the first three decades of the relations between Jerusalem and Ankara (1951–1978) have been described by scholars as the ‘mistress syndrome’ period, underpinned by the secret Phantom Pact doctrine which Israeli policymakers, particularly Ben Gurion, initiated.<sup>21</sup> This period was characterised by Israeli attempts to forge a distinctive role in the non-Arab Middle East in the early 1960s. Although this pact had lost its core significance by the late 1960s, it had fostered substantial exchanges between Israel, Iran and Turkey. The second period, meanwhile, began in the later 1970s, more precisely from 1978 until the late 1980s. This period is characterised by the deterioration in Israeli-Turkish relations, to the point of almost complete breakdown through most of the 1980s. The early 1990s mark the third period, which are known in the literature as the ‘the romantic period’ of Israeli-Turkish relations, fostered by the Oslo accord (1994) and reduced tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>22</sup> This period was characterised by increased military and economic cooperation supplemented by a boost in tourism and cultural exchanges. The period from early 2000 until today (2019) has been marked in the scholarship as the ‘Neo-Ottomanism period’. Based upon the rebirth of the Islamic character of modern Turkey and the Ottoman past, mainly fostered by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the person of the prime minister/president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, during this period of time, Israeli-Turkish relations have slowly but surely deteriorated, in parallel with increasing Turkish support for the Palestinians and Hamas. This deterioration in relations has also been provoked by Prime Minister Binyamin

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<sup>21</sup> See Noa Schonmann, “Back-Door Diplomacy: The Mistress Syndrome in Israel’s Relations with Turkey, 1957–60,” in *Israel’s Clandestine Diplomacies*, eds. Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 85–102.

<sup>22</sup> For example: Alon Liel, *Demo Islam: A New Regime in Turkey* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2003), 185–88.

<sup>23</sup> David Kushner, “Turkish–Israeli Relations in Historical Perspective,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2016): 220.



Netanyahu's often inflammatory rhetoric towards Ankara.

Tapping into the first period, as the literature on the roots of the relation points out, there is a Jewish dimension to interaction between Israel and Turkey that goes back to the Ottoman Empire. Amikam Nachmani, Alon Liel and Joshua Walker each propose that the initial connection between Jews and Turks emerged in 1492 when the Jews were expelled from Spain, and fled into the Ottoman Empire, which granted them a new home as 'people of the book'. As the three scholars suggest, this was an important factor in establishing the historical connection between Israel and Turkey, which underpinned the modern diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel.<sup>24</sup>

One point that should be mentioned to explain how the relations initially started is the suggestion of George E. Gruen and Suha Bolukbasi highlighting the impact of Turkey's pragmatic foreign policy when establishing relations with Israel. As Gruen points out, there were two main reasons for Turkey's initial vote against the establishment of Israel at the United Nations' General Assembly's 29 November 1947 partition resolution: firstly, Turkey agreed with the views of the "Arabists in the British Foreign Office and the US State Department" that the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in the Arab Middle East would create a constant war zone in the region. Second, in a Cold War context, there was a fear of the Soviet Union trying to use Israel as its 'proxy' in the Middle East to weaken the influence of the Western Bloc in that region.<sup>25</sup>

Moving on, as Liel notes, the importance of relations with Turkey held such a high priority for Israel in its early years that Eliahu Sasson, Israel's greatest expert on the Middle East, was forced to leave all of his former commitments in the MFA, and move to Turkey to become Israel's first representative there. Furthermore, Liel emphasises that, in the early 1950s, Israel asked Turkey to allow the establishment of Israeli consulates in several eastern Turkish cities close to Turkey's borders with Iraq and Syria, but the Turks refused these requests.<sup>26</sup> This reveals Israel's desire to make

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<sup>24</sup> See Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey, and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 45–6; Joshua Walker, "Turkey and Israel's Relationship in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2006): 62; Alon Liel, *Turkey: Military, Islam and Politics 1970–2000* (Tel Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 185–86.

<sup>25</sup> George E. Gruen, "Dynamic Progress in Turkish-Israeli Relations," *Israel Affairs* 1, no. 4 (1995): 40–70, see also Suha Bolukbasi, "Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance: A Turkish View," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no.1 (1999): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Liel, *Turkey: Military*, 185.

use of Turkey's geographical location to establish posts that could serve Israel's interests in having a presence close to the border of those Arab countries which were important members of the Arab coalition against Israel in the region.<sup>27</sup>

The first setback in relations occurred in 1955. 'The Baghdad Pact',<sup>28</sup> between Turkey and Iraq, and later incorporating the UK, Iran and Pakistan, entailed an agreement between Turkey and Iraq that their countries would cooperate against any UN resolution concerning Israel. This declaration caused the Israelis good reasons for concern and, for the first time, the hostility of the Palestinian/Arab world became evident in relations with Turkey. Subsequently, as George E. Gruen, Alon Liel, Suha Bolukbasi show, the Suez Crisis in 1956, i.e. Israel's invasion of the Egyptian Sinai provoked Turkey to withdraw its ambassador from Tel Aviv and to downgrade its diplomatic representation to the chargé d'affaires level.<sup>29</sup> This scenario seemed to repeat itself later in 1980–1985, highlighting how pivotal Turkey's sensitive relations with the Arab world were to Israeli-Turkish relations.

Perhaps the most significant development of the 1950s was in 1958 when the Baghdad Pact disintegrated after an anti-Western coup in Iraq. As Turkey came to realise that Iraq was withdrawing from the Western camp,<sup>30</sup> it gradually improved its ties with Israel. Bengio Schonmann and Alpher show that this improvement was cemented in August 1959 with Ben Gurion's visit to Ankara and the signing of a strategic agreement between the two countries, as part of the 'Periphery Doctrine' including Israel, Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia.<sup>31</sup> The core of this treaty was that all the

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<sup>27</sup> Efraim Inbar, "The Resilience of Israeli-Turkish Relations," *Israel Affairs* 11, no.4 (2005): 591–60; Aras Bülent, *Palestinian Israeli peace process and Turkey* (Commack: Nova Science Publishers, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> "The Baghdad Pact" (1955) During the first decade of the Cold War, the Middle East was the focus of much attention from the great powers. Hence, Turkey signed an agreement with Iraq and later the UK, Iran and Pakistan (all American allies) to create a blocking belt against the Soviet Union in the Middle East. For more on this see: B. Kemal Yeşilbursa, *The Baghdad Pact: Anglo-American Defence Policies in the Middle East, 1950–59* (London: Routledge, 2005); and more recently: Orna Almog and Ayşegül, "Sever Hide and Seek? Israeli–Turkish Relations and the Baghdad Pact," *Middle Eastern Studies* 53, no.4 (2017): 609–23.

<sup>29</sup> Michael B. Bishku, "How Has Turkey Viewed Israel?" *Israel Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2006): 177–94 (especially 23); George E. Gruen, "Turkey, Israel and the Palestine Question, 1948–1960: A Study in the Diplomacy of Ambivalence" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1970), 342–44; Schonmann, "Back-Door Diplomacy," 89.

<sup>30</sup> Liel, *Turkey: Military*, 188.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this see: Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 37; and more recently Schonmann, "Back-Door Diplomacy,"; Noa Schonmann, *Israel's Phantom Pact: Foreign Policy on the Periphery of the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming, 2019); and Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

non-Arab countries in the Middle East would come together to provide security and share intelligence against the hostile Arab countries. The treaty disintegrated during the 1970s after changes in regime in Ethiopia and Iran.

Moving ahead, the trend in Israeli-Turkish relations in the 1960s and most of the 1970s was mainly characterised by the latter's relations with the Arab world, the Palestinian question and, especially, the two Israeli wars during those years. In the 1967 Six Days War Turkey voted in favour of UN Resolution 242, which demanded Israeli forces leave the occupied territories.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Turkey was aligned clearly with the Arab world. The shift in the world's oil production due to the Yom Kippur War served to put the Muslim oil producers in a position of power to push Turkey towards the Arab position on Israel.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Turkey supported the 1974 UN resolution 3632, which granted the Palestinians recognition of their rights, including the right of return to their occupied territories. This trend continued with 1975 resolution 3379 equating Zionism with racism. This served to signal Turkey's stance in respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Arab world and the Middle East. The Arab world recognised these two votes against Israel as a sign of the weakness of Turkish-Israeli relations, and sought further to pressure Turkey to break its ties with the Jewish state.<sup>34</sup> Turkey, meanwhile, as a secular Muslim state, was able to maintain a somewhat balanced approach towards Israel, arguing for an independent foreign policy doctrine. The gradual escalation of tension in the relationship in the late 1960s and early 1970s could be seen as the preface to the crisis between 1978 and 1985, however.

*The Last Decade of the Cold War: The 'Armenian Genocide Period' in  
Israeli-Turkish Relations?*

As noted, although the historiography on Israeli-Turkish relations is prolific, especially on the 1950s and 1960s, a gap exists with respect to the crisis of the late 1970s into the early 1980s. There is actually rather limited empirical work evaluating the dynamics between the two countries between 1978 and 1980, especially from the Israeli viewpoint. The gap is particularly evident when one turns to assess whether the Israeli MFA made any diplomatic efforts to stop a complete rupture in relations. Set against the 1979 Iranian revolution, the possibility of losing Turkey to the hands of Muslim

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<sup>32</sup> Bolukbasi, "A Turkish View," 185.

<sup>33</sup> Liel, *Turkey: Military*, 190.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., and Bishku, "How Has Turkey," 185.

fundamentalists has remained an acute gap in the literature, and one that must be addressed. Nonetheless, the works that have examined this period in the literature do provide an initial assessment of the circumstances that underpinned the crisis. These can be grouped into two main clusters: the first cluster of works such as that of George E. Gruen, Alon Liel, Raphael Israeli, Ofra Bengio and Amikam Nachmani, focused on the pragmatic reasons for the setback,<sup>35</sup> i.e. the legislation of the Jerusalem Law of 1980, and the reactions to this in the international community, especially the Arab world, as being the main trigger for the escalation of the crisis between Israel and Turkey.<sup>36</sup> More recently, Arye Naor discovered that the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin did not push for this law, as one might have imagined considering its political ideology. The official status of Jerusalem was dropped from the Camp David Conference in September 1978, deferring the matter, including the occupied territories from the 1967 Six Day War, to the upcoming peace agreement with Egypt in 1979. By contrast, it was the opposition parties, led by Geula Cohen, which initiated the law. Begin supported the law although he believed it was unnecessary.<sup>37</sup> These works emphasised that, given Turkey's energy problems and its own economic social and political state, Turkey was willing to 'pay' the Arabs in Israeli currency and to downgrade its diplomatic relations with the latter.

The second cluster of research includes works by Michael B. Bishku, Umut Uzer, Bali Aykan, Bülent Aras, and Alexander Murinson<sup>38</sup> all of which outline the

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<sup>35</sup> For this cluster see for example: George E. Gruen, "Turkey's Relations with Israel and Its Arab Neighbour: The Impact of Basic Interests and Changing Circumstances," *Middle East Review* 17, no. 3 (1985): 33–43; Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East: Oil, Islam and Politics* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1994), 47, 190; also Liel, *Turkey: Military*, 127–46; Baruch Gilad, "Our Neighbours: Turkey and Cyprus," in *Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the First Fifty Years* eds. Yegar, Govrin, and Oded, (Jerusalem: Ketter Publishing, 2002), 371–77; Raphael Israeli, "The Land of Many Crossroads The Turkish-Israeli Odd Couple," *Orbis* 45, no. 1 (2001): 65–79; Nachmani, *Turkey Facing a New Millennium*.

<sup>36</sup> The Jerusalem Law passed on 30 July 1980 in the Israeli Knesset defines the legal status of Jerusalem. The law notes that Jerusalem is complete and united as the capital of Israel, including the territories occupied during the Six-Day War of 1967. See the full version of the law at: [www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic10\\_eng](http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic10_eng). (accessed 15 February, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Arye Naor, "Menachem Begin and 'Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel,'" *Israel Studies* 21, no. 3 (2016): 36–48.

<sup>38</sup> For this cluster works see for example: Bishku, "Viewed Israel?," 180–84; Mohamut Bali Aykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy From the 1950s to the 1990s," *The Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993): 91–110; Bülent Aras, "Turkish Foreign Policy and Jerusalem: Towards a Societal Construction of Foreign Policy," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 22:4 (2000): 31–58; Bolukbasi, *Behind the Turkish-Israeli Alliance*; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 22–37; and Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 945–64.

ideological factors surrounding the deterioration in relations. This cluster of scholars argue that Turkish drives to boycott Israel reflected the dominance of a Turkish Pro-Muslim foreign policy as a consequence of continuing domestic political tension between the secular and the pro-Muslim sections in the Turkish political landscape. For example, the recent work by Umut Uzer assesses the degree to which the Israeli legislation of the 1980 Jerusalem Law provoked a huge demonstration by Turkey's Islamist powers, the National Salvation Party and the Welfare Party, both representing the Islamist movement.<sup>39</sup> A few weeks after the Jerusalem Law was enacted and six days before Turkey's 1980 military coup, on 6 September 1980, the 'liberation of Jerusalem demonstration' took place in the city of Konya, Turkey.<sup>40</sup> Konya was known as the home of very religious Muslims in Turkey, and the demonstration brought to the streets more than 20,000 people. Also, as Uzer uncovers in his account, this in fact stimulated the Turkish military to enact its planned takeover and is thus important to understand the rupture in Israeli-Turkish relations in 1980.

Both clusters complement each other in the sense that they both highlight the importance of the Muslim world to Turkey. The former cluster gives a more international 'realist' explanation to the boycott, while the latter cluster gives a more substantial importance to Turkey's older Muslim heritage and to domestic and cultural engagements. Neither cluster, however, focuses on the specific period between 1978 and 1980, only tackling this implicitly as part of a broader historical survey of Israeli-Turkish relations. This chapter offers further commentary that contributes to this historiographical debate. Although the clusters are complementary to each other, the fact remains that both emphasise only one of the two reasons, ideological versus pragmatic.

Only two works are exceptional and can be cited here, though both mention this period only briefly. David Kushner's recent work, which surveyed Israeli-Turkish relations from an historical perspective, linked the reduced Israeli-Turkish relations to the rise of the National Salvation Party, a new Islamist party that participated in several coalition governments at the time and whose policies were reflected in those of the

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<sup>39</sup> Umut Uzer, "Turkey's Islamist Movement and the Palestinian Cause: the 1980 'Liberation of Jerusalem' Demonstration and the 1997 'Jerusalem Night' as Case Studies," *Israel Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2017): 22–39

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

military government under General Kenan Evren.<sup>41</sup> The work of M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, two Turkish scholars, meanwhile, emphasises the impact of petrodollars and oil-oriented policy on Turkish foreign policy between 1979 and 1988, seeing this as the main explanation for the deterioration in Israeli-Turkish relations during the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> While these are centrally important observations for this period, it is evident that scholars who are engaged with Israeli-Turkish relations have tended to overlook this period because, *prima facie*, nothing was happening. Needless to say, just as the Armenian genocide has not been studied in depth in respect to Israeli-Turkish relations, the general lack of work on this period exacerbates that lacuna.

In the third period, much of the scholarship has focused on how the end of the Cold War and the 1994 Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinians fostered the best period in Israeli-Turkish relations.<sup>43</sup> The main scholarly works in relation to this period are those of Hakan Yavuz, David Kushner and Alon Liel, outlining the transformation from the normalisation of the late 1980s to a strategic partnership during the 1990s, leading to this period being referred to in many works as ‘the romantic period’.<sup>44</sup> During this period from 1992 until 2003, Israel and Turkey exchanged ambassadors for the first time since 1951. Furthermore, set against the 1994 Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinians, the countries enjoyed a surge in bilateral trade and military training.<sup>45</sup>

The fourth and last period in the bilateral relations is characterised by the coming to power of Erdoğan. The years between 2002 and 2019 have produced numerous publications by Turkish, Israeli and American scholars such as Aytürk, Uzar, Eligür, Inbar, Kushner and others.<sup>46</sup> Without getting into the details of the debate because it is far beyond the scope of the period covered by this thesis, this new stream

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<sup>41</sup> Kushner, “Turkish–Israeli Relations,” 216.

<sup>42</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz and Mujeeb R. Khan, “Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Duality and Development,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1992): 69–94.

<sup>43</sup> İhsan Gurkan, “Turkish-Israeli Relations and the Middle East Peace Process,” *Turkish Review of Middle East Studies* 7, (1993): 123.

<sup>44</sup> Liel, *Demo Islam*, 185–88; M. Hakan Yavuz, “Turkish-Israeli Relations Through the Lens of the Turkish Identity Debate,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 22–37; Kushner, “Turkish–Israeli Relations,”

<sup>45</sup> Cenap Çakmak and Murat Ustaoglu, “Politics vs. Trade: A Realist View on Turkish–Israeli Economic Relations,” *Israel Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2017): 303–23.

<sup>46</sup> İlker Aytürk, “The Coming of an Ice Age? Turkish–Israeli Relations Since 2002,” *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 675–87; Banu Eligür, “Crisis in Turkish–Israeli Relations (December 2008–June 2011): From Partnership to Enmity,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 3 (2012): 429–59; Efrim Inbar, “Israeli–Turkish Tensions and their International Ramifications,” *Orbis* 55, no. 1 (2011): 132–47; Kilic B. Kanat, Jackson Hannon, “Turkey-Israel Relations in the New Era: Opportunities and Challenges,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2017): 64–86 and many others.

in the literature has tried to evaluate how the new administrations in Ankara and in Jerusalem have contributed to the decline in relations. Other works have tried to evaluate Turkey's new role as a mediator in the Middle East, and how Israeli-Turkish relations have been affected by the Arab Spring.

All in all, the literature on Israeli-Turkish relations is extensive and the focus of many scholars and policy makers. From this review, it is evident that the Armenian factor has been generally overlooked by scholars who have tended to study other dimensions of the countries' relations. Although limited in scope compared to the question of Jerusalem or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Armenian genocide is still critically important to a full understanding of the late 1970s and most of the 1980s and it is therefore this gap that this thesis seeks to fill.

### **Cold War History and The Middle East**

#### *Situating the Crisis in Israel-Turkey Relations (1980–1985) within the Wider Context of the Middle East and the Cold War*

The third debate focuses on the Cold War and the Middle East. As the works by Douglas Little, Salim Yaquub and Paul Thomas Chamberlin have shown, the region has been widely recognised as an important area for superpower rivalry in the Cold War context, in respect to securing resources, such as oil, from the Arab countries, recruiting regional allies, and monitoring the Israeli-Arab conflict.<sup>47</sup> Apart from these factors, in the two earlier decades of the Cold War, the image of the two sides 'chewing the bone' of the Middle East was an applicable image to describe the 1956, 1967 and 1973 conflicts. Subsequently, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and then the attempts to exploit the Iranian revolution, marked the last achievements of Moscow in the region. In the 1980s, the 'two dogs chewing a bone' image was outdated due to the dominance of the Americans, and the hard line taken Reagan towards Moscow, which reduced the influence of the Soviets in the Middle East. As Paul Chamberlin has noted, no other

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<sup>47</sup> See for example among others, Douglas Little, "The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez crisis to Camp David Accords," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. II, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 305–26; Salim Yaquub "The Cold War and the Middle East," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (Oxford: oxford University Press), 246–65; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, "The Cold War in the Middle East," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle (New York: Routledge, 2014), 163–77.

Cold War frontier nor geographic region witnessed such a blend of war and crises during the East-West dispute than the Middle East.<sup>48</sup>

To recap, from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s, US policy in the region was essentially steady, with only slight changes from one administration to another. Securing Israel, reducing the influence of the USSR on Arab radical nationalism and making sure that the Western Bloc maintained its access to the oil resources of the Persian Gulf were the core elements of the US grand strategy during these decades.<sup>49</sup> The Soviets, meanwhile, had a more dynamic approach to their policy towards the Middle East. Although in the 1950s and 1960s the Soviets sought to promote Arab nationalism as an anti-Western strategy, they failed to cement a widespread pro-Soviet shift in the region.<sup>50</sup> The 1970s, meanwhile, were an era of US dominance in the Middle East, marked by the Arab-Israeli peace process, in which the US rather than the Soviets played the major part.<sup>51</sup> In the context of the 1980s as noted precisely by Chamberlin:

The Iranian Revolution, Iran–Iraq War, and the Lebanese Civil War demonstrated that, although the United States had gained the upper hand in the Cold War struggle for the Middle East, the region was still fraught with tension. Indeed, the Middle East of the 1980s was in many respects a more dangerous place than it had been in previous decades, despite or perhaps even because of the declining influence of the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup>

Building on the analysis by Chamberlin, Israel and Turkey were both very important actors in the superpowers' battle for Cold War dominance in the Middle East. Turkey, an important NATO member, was the lynchpin stopping the spread of communism towards Southern Europe and the Middle East. Israel, meanwhile, was massively supported by the US with financial aid, arms and military training and served as a beacon for Western values in the region. By contrast, the Arab countries were trained and supported by the Soviets. In this context, Israeli-Turkish relations were not just a

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<sup>48</sup> Chamberlin, "The Cold War," 163.

<sup>49</sup> Little, "The Cold War," 325.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the Soviets' policy failures in Iran and Afghanistan, see *ibid.*, and Amin Saikal "Islamism, the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan," *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112–34.

<sup>52</sup> Chamberlin, "The Cold War," 175.



regional factor in the Middle East but vital to the wider Cold War dynamic both within and beyond the region.

As Geir Lundestad's monumental work *Empire by Invitation?* (1986) proposed, in the early years of the Cold War, secondary powers such as Western European governments influenced US foreign policy decision-making regarding the integration of Western European countries into the Western Bloc.<sup>53</sup> The two dogs image emphasises the power of the superpowers chewing up the lesser powers within their big confrontation; Lundestad was challenging that approach by proposing that the smaller powers could and did influence the superpowers.

Lundestad's analysis is potentially applicable to the Middle East and the Israeli rapprochement with Turkey. In the case of this thesis—borrowing from Lundestad's analysis on Europe and the Cold War—secondary Cold War powers (Turkey), followed by regional states (Israel), were likely to influence the policies of the superpowers in the Middle East (i.e., the US) for their diplomatic ends, specifically, the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. Although this thesis addresses the late Cold War period (1978–1988), the particularly intense regional dynamics after the Polish crisis, and the renewed superpower tension, one can still articulate international relations in the region in terms of attempts to encourage American influence to meet the strategic diplomatic aims of the secondary or regional powers.

## **The Historiography of the Cold War**

### *The 1975 Helsinki Accord and the Question of Human Rights*

The Cold War is the most extensively-analysed period studied by historians of modern times. Within this literature three debates need to be confronted to situate the main argument of the thesis and point out where and how the focus on the Armenian genocide serves to expand current debates. All three relevant debates are critically summarised here. First is the debate about how the bipolar rivalry of the Cold War played out in varying policies on human rights values. This brings into focus the implementation of the 1948 UNGC and is relevant to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. These unfold to a fundamental question in Cold War history literature: 'how did the Cold War end?' Changing views within the western alliance regarding human rights

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<sup>53</sup> Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 263–77.

priorities could provide an engaging answer to this question. The second debate is about the ‘second Cold War’ or the transformation from conflict resolution (détente) to conflict escalation (renewed tension and arms race) between the East and the West in the late 1970s and through the 1980s; third, is the debate surrounding the function of the Middle East as an arena for the bipolar tension.

Turning to the first debate, the literature on human rights and the Cold War is growing rapidly. For example, Rosemary Foot, Barbara Key, Samuel Moyn, the recently edited volume by Akira Iriye et al., and Roland Burke, have all surveyed the concept of human rights during the Cold War and beyond from various perspectives.<sup>54</sup>

This scholarship concludes that human rights were highly contested and elusive throughout this period of the Cold War. The literature looks in particular at the Helsinki process, which started in 1973 with the CSCE, and resulted in the Helsinki accord in 1975, and its subsequent implementation. Most of this literature focuses on how the agreements were used by the Soviets to leverage their agenda, and whether, and if so how, the agreements influenced reforms in the Eastern European countries. This section, however, focuses on how the Helsinki agreement was interpreted by Western Europe and the US when confronting the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in 1986–1987, especially with the 1987 resolutions. As Keys and Burke noted, the West European governments advanced the 1975 Helsinki Accords as including “a set of provisions on humanitarian cooperation endorsing the view that protection of human rights was linked to international security”.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the vision of the Helsinki Accords and détente was that protecting human rights meant keeping the world a safer place without the need for arm races.

The human rights factor had become more and more evident with the renewed arms race between Washington and the Kremlin that began in 1979 and that put an end to détente. The work by Geir Lundestad argued that although Western European

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<sup>54</sup> See for example, Rosemary Foot, “The Cold War and Human Rights,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), vol. 2, 445–65; Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde and William I. Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Sarah B. Snyder, “Human Rights and the Cold War,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War*, eds. Artemy M. Kalinovsky, Craig Daigle (New York: Routledge, 2014), 237–48; Keys and Burke, “Human Rights”, 486–507; and Sarah Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Keys and Burke, “Human Rights,” 495.

countries and the US had supported human rights protection as a core Western value in the East-West rivalry, they also had different priorities on how to implement this.<sup>56</sup> For example, as the work by John W. Young showcases, during the Carter administration, it was evident that Carter's human rights agenda became increasingly difficult to stick to as the renewed bipolar tension increased after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan because the renewed East-West polarisation meant that it was more risky for the US to pressure its allies in respect to their human rights contraventions. The Soviet invasion stimulated the US understanding that détente and human rights protections were no longer a bridge between the superpowers. In this context, as noted by Young, after Reagan had defeated Carter in the 1980 election, emphasising in so doing the tough line he intended to take against the Kremlin's ambitions, the transatlantic tension between the US and the Western Europeans continued to grow in terms of their respective commitment to the Helsinki Accords.<sup>57</sup> Specifically, while the Western Europeans were busy with improving the Cold War climate and reducing the need for the arms race, Reagan's hard line against the Soviets emphasised the need to wear out the Kremlin by extending the arms race.

### **Mapping Western Historiography of the Armenian Genocide**

The one hundredth anniversary of the Armenian genocide was commemorated in 2015. In the introduction to the 2015 *Journal of Genocide Research Special Issue: The Armenian Genocide after 100 Years: New Historical Perspectives*, Taner Akçam argues that only now has the Armenian genocide received its due recognition. Akçam maintains that this landmark anniversary reveals that "Armenian genocide research has passed through the same stages as other episodes of mass murder".<sup>58</sup> While the Armenian genocide may have indeed needed time to develop as an important case study of modern genocide, this long-awaited prominence is also due to the thrust of recent developments in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies.

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<sup>56</sup> Geir Lundestad, "The European Role at the Beginning and Particularly the End of the Cold War," in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004), 50–68; John W. Young, "Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979–1989," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, vol. II*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289–310.

<sup>57</sup> Young, "Western Europe," 293.

<sup>58</sup> Taner Akçam, "Introduction," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 255–58.

Using Üngör's three-layered Matryoshka doll metaphor of macro (international perspective), meso (state perspective), and micro-levels (the individual perspective), I cite here current, relevant studies that outline problematic, unaddressed areas of research and situate my endeavours within those boundaries. Akçam points out that scholars like Mark Levene have analysed the Armenian genocide at the macro level only.<sup>59</sup> The next object of study should be regions in Turkey such as Diyarbakır where the genocide took place. Akçam's third area of research is the zone of memory studies, i.e. the oral histories and survivor accounts that reveal the bitter residue of the genocide.<sup>60</sup> Akçam's outline provides not only structural order, but also organises the themes in my own work.

Indeed, Akçam provides a useful opening statement to examine the development of scholarship by scholars such as Vahakn N. Dadrian, Richard Hovannisian, Israel Charny, Yair Auron, Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, Robert Jay Lifton, Taner Akçam, and, more recently by Bedross Der-Matossian, Donald Bloxham, Fatma Müge Göçek, Uğur Ümit Üngör, Simon Payaslian, Ronald G. Suny, Marc A. Mamigonian, and others.<sup>61</sup> Generally, one of the serious difficulties involved in undertaking research on the denial of the Armenian genocide has been the moral engagement and emotional attachment of some of the scholars, mainly but not exclusively among the first generations of scholars, such as Charny, Smith, Auron and, more recently, the French journalist/scholars Laure Marchand and Guillaume Perrier.<sup>62</sup>

A sub-group within this cluster (of emotive writings on the denial phenomenon) is the work of Mamigonian, Balkian, Hovannisian and others, some of whom are second and third generation victims of the Armenian genocide. The latter sub-group is somewhat focused on tracing the blame for the denial, rather than finding new empirical

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<sup>59</sup> Mark Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide, Vol. I: Devastation: the European Rimlands, 1912–1938* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Akçam, "Introduction," 257.

<sup>61</sup> See for instance: Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Richard Hovannisian, *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of The Armenian Genocide* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Uğur Ümit Üngör, "Lost in Commemoration: the Armenian Genocide in Memory and Identity," *Patterns of Prejudice* 48 no. 2 (2014): 147–66 (especially 157–8); and Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, Robert Jay Lifton, "Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust Genocide Studies* 9, no.1 (1995): 1–22 to mention only a few.

<sup>62</sup> See for example: Israel Charny, "Innocent Denials of Known Genocides: A Further Contribution to a Psychology of Denial of Genocide," *Human Rights Review* 1, no. 3 (2000): 15–39; Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 351–61; and more recently Laure Marchand, Guillaume Perrier, translated by Debbie Blythe, *Turkey and the Armenian Ghost: On the Trail of the Genocide* (Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press, 2015).

evidence that uncovers the drivers of the diplomacy of genocide regarding the denial.<sup>63</sup> The emotional issues tend to distract some of those scholars from assessing empirical evidence and providing historical analysis with an open mind, especially with regards to Armenian terrorism; I will develop the latter point further in the review on the response to Armenian terrorism. In particular, their accounts tend to preach to the readers about how the denial by Turkey and its allies is a moral injustice afflicting the Armenian victims and their families. While this sub-group is particularly interested in the context of my research project, most have ignored the period of Armenian terrorism (1975–1985), especially those Armenian scholars who have primarily written on the Armenian genocide and its denial (such as Hovannisian, Der-Matossian and Mamigonian). Other Armenian scholars, however, such as Tololyan, Panossian and, to some extent Dadrian, who have written more broadly on Armenian nationalism, do address Armenian terrorism.

During the one hundredth anniversary of the Armenian genocide, in 2015, a number of analytical reviews were published in the field. The works by Der-Matossian and Jo Laycock have each reviewed the extensive literature on the Armenian genocide.<sup>64</sup> As noted by Jo Laycock, scholarship on the Armenian genocide has shifted since 2000: away from establishing evidence that the 1915 events constituted genocide against the Armenians under the 1948 UNGC to more nuanced, theoretically informed, approaches to study both the motives and the experience and memory of genocide.<sup>65</sup> This observation by Laycock is connected to the shifts in the field of Holocaust and Genocide studies more generally, which is increasingly seeking to contextualise genocide in light of the broad historical and global changes since 1850. I will discuss these transformations in depth in the subsequent section on Holocaust historiography.

Der-Matossian, meanwhile, has identified a few areas that need further research, including the following:

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<sup>63</sup> See for instance: Marc A. Mamigonian, “Academic Denial of the Armenian Genocide in American Scholarship: Denialism as Manufactured Controversy,” *Genocide Studies International* 9, no. 1 (2015): 61–82; Richard G Hovannisian, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide 100 Years Later: The New Practitioners and Their Trade,” *Genocide Studies International* 9, no. 2 (2015): 228–47.

<sup>64</sup> Bedross Der Matossian, “Explaining the Unexplainable: Recent Trends in the Armenian Genocide Historiography,” *Journal of Levantine Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 143–66; Jo Laycock, “Beyond National Narratives? Centenary Histories, the First World War and the Armenian Genocide Armenian Genocide,” *Revolutionary Russia* 28, no. 2 (2015): 93–117.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

1. microhistorical approaches to the Armenian Genocide; 2. the Armenian Genocide in the broader context of the Christian genocides in the empire; 3. an in-depth examination of the second phase of the genocide; 4. the economic dimension of the Armenian Genocide; 5. comparative perspectives on the Armenian Genocide; 6. women and children during the Armenian Genocide; 7. humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention in the Armenian Genocide; 8. cultural genocide; and 9. oral history and the Armenian Genocide.<sup>66</sup>

It is worth paying attention to the first item in Der-Matossian's list, which parallels the trend towards microhistorical research in Holocaust studies within the periphery of Eastern Europe (Segal, Levene, Bloxham and Zalc & Bruttman). This is hardly a surprising development since some of the more important contributors to the Armenian genocide literature are Donald Bloxham, Uğur Üngör, Ronald Suny, Taner Akçam and others who have made earlier contributions to the field of Holocaust studies (Bloxham), and genocide studies more broadly.

Further, with respect to the macro perspective, the seminal work of Bloxham is one of the first accounts to place the Armenian genocide within a series of important international contexts.<sup>67</sup> Bloxham's work is so influential in Armenian genocide literature that many of the recent works published in recent years, such as those by Ronald Suny, Raymond Kevorkian, Müge Göçek, have applied his approach of interconnected modernities, i.e. approaching the continuity in violence against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in the later nineteenth century, through to the Balkan Wars and WWI. It should be noted that Bloxham's work has been influential not just on the macro level of the study of the genocide but also in respect to work on sociological aspects of the 1915 genocide.<sup>68</sup>

More recently, scholars such as Eric Weitz, Donald Bloxham, Ara Sarafian, Stefan Ihrig, Jay Winter and others, have tapped into the international dimension of the Armenian genocide from various perspectives, mainly the roles of the US and Germany

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<sup>66</sup> Der Matossian, "Explaining the Unexplainable," 156.

<sup>67</sup> Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28–68.

<sup>68</sup> See for instance Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London and New York, Zed publication, 2004); Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (I.B. Tauris & Co, 2011); Suny, *They Can Live*; only to mention a few.

during the genocide.<sup>69</sup> In the case of the former, for instance, the work of Bloxham, Payaslian and Winter highlight the economic and trade dimension of the US in the Near East. They argue, respectfully, that US trading interests in the region influenced its approach to the genocide.<sup>70</sup> Bloxham, for example, meticulously explains that the US High Commissioner to Turkey from 1919 to 1927, Admiral Mark L. Bristol, had personal involvement in ensuring US non-interference in the genocide as part of US strategic thinking in the Near East region – specifically on account of the important role that the US and Bristol attached to Turkey as a conduit for US economic penetration and regional stability in the area.<sup>71</sup>

In this international context, Bloxham's book also discusses two important points that this dissertation aims to expand on: firstly, that Turkish-American relations improved during the last decade of the Cold War, starting after the Cyprus crisis of 1974 and accelerating after the 1980 military coup. Bloxham notes that this seems somewhat paradoxical in that while US foreign policy advanced human rights as a core value the role of democracy in Turkey was being abused. Second, Bloxham also argues that “the improvement was also related to a renewed polarization of superpower politics”.<sup>72</sup>

The argument of this thesis is informed by the above points. Specifically, the thesis aims to offer an in-depth explanation of the paradox Bloxham refers to by focusing on Israel's influence on US foreign policy on the Armenian genocide and other issues during the 1980s; advancing this as another important explanation for the paradox above.

Another important debate in the historiography of the Armenian genocide is the Workshop of Armenian Turkish Studies (hereafter WATS). This unique workshop was

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<sup>69</sup> See for example for earlier publications on this perspective: Salahi R. Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* (London: K. Rustem and Brother, 1987); Hilmar Kaiser, “Germany and the Armenian Genocide: A Review Essay,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 8 (1995): 127–42; and Vahakn N. Dadrian, *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity* (Watertown: Blue Crane Books, 1996); Jay Winter, *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and more recently see Eric D. Weitz, “Germany and the Young Turks: Revolutionaries into Statesmen,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Göçek et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 175–98; Ara Sarafian, *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913–1916* (London: Gomidas Institute, 2004); and Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> See Weitz, “Germany and the Young Turks”; Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*.

<sup>71</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 187–206. (especially 187).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

first launched in 2000 to join Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish scholars in a number of workshops in Chicago and Michigan to study the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the role of ethnic minorities in the declining Empire and the Republic of Turkey. Not surprisingly, a core theme of those meetings has been the question of the Armenian genocide. The workshop has produced quality work in the form of an edited volume entitled: *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (2011). The volume puts together a series of articles that demonstrate various perspectives on the Armenian genocide. Perhaps the most controversial part of the book is its introduction, however. The editors choose to justify the title of the volume *A Question of Genocide*. As Ronald Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek notes the title of the book “reflects both the certainty of some and the ambiguity of others, not so much on the nature of the killings, but how they might most convincingly be described”.<sup>73</sup>

Bedross Der Matossian, has criticised the volume editors’ introduction. He criticises the volume editors for their odd choice to leave out extensive archival material on the genocide in the victims’ mother tongue.<sup>74</sup> To better understand Der Matossian's claim, one needs to tap into one of his latest works, which is based on archival research from the Archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.<sup>75</sup> Der Matossian problematises the minimal use made by Armenian historians of those sources due to their wish not to be seen as biased by international historians. At the heart of the issue there is a serious methodological challenge: on the one hand, it is obvious that since the Armenian genocide by now has an international importance and, given that the historiography of the genocide is extremely politicised, the level of distrust among some of the scholars who study it is extremely high. On the other hand, Armenian historians and Western historians vigorously argue that Turkish denial historiography is extremely biased due to the fact that it relies on documentation from the perpetrator group.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Ronald Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek, “Introduction” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, eds. Göçek et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Bedross Der Matossian, “The Definitiveness of Genocide and A Question of Genocide: A Review Essay,” *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 20, (2011): 173–87. (especially 176).

<sup>75</sup> See Bedross Der Matossian, “The Genocide Archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem,” *Armenian Review* 53, no. 1–2 (2012): 15–37.

<sup>76</sup> A very good example of these problematic sources, and distrust about them in the historiographical debate, is on the last on the *JGR* about the Sarkis Torossian memoirs. Torossian was an Ottoman Armenian, and officer in the Ottoman army. After Torossian discovered that his whole family had been murdered in the genocide he switched sides and fought against the Ottomans. The memoirs about his military service that he published in 1947 were attacked by one group of scholars as fabricated. In contrast, another group of scholars assessed these memoirs as reliable and as proving the genocide



Moving into the meso level of analysis, the socio-political nature of Turkish nationalism is addressed in the writings of several scholars, such as Taner Akçam, Uğur Ümit Üngör, Ronald G. Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, Rebecca Jinks and others.<sup>77</sup> Raymond Kévorkian's *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (2011) is a seminal work in this category. His interdisciplinary account focuses on the “institutional, political, social, and even psychological mechanisms that culminated in the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians”.<sup>78</sup> Kévorkian gives special attention to the decision-making process of the Young Turk regime in its perpetration of the genocide. This 1040-page book, huge even in terms of academic writing, provides an in-depth analytic framing of events, the causes of the genocide, and their impact upon modern Turkey.

Another debate in the meso level of the historiography deals with plunder. The works of Hilmar Kaiser, Bedross Der Matossian, Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt, Yair Yuron and Hrayr S Karagueuzian have explored the confiscation and plundering of Armenian property during the genocide.<sup>79</sup> More recently, the important contribution to this ongoing debate, is Akçam and Kurt's *The Spirit of Laws: the Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (2015), which looks into a series of laws enacted during the Ottoman Empire. Abandoned property laws “were a structural element of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 as well as of today’s Turkish legal system, and yet, paradoxically, they [now] protect the rights of the Armenians to their property”.<sup>80</sup> The authors point out that although the dispossession of Armenian property was carried out by the Ottoman Empire, it largely serves the

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against the Armenians, or, as Taner Akçam put this, “His [Torossian] memoirs represent a total discrediting of the Turkish historical narrative on Armenians and the Armenian Genocide”. For more on this see Akçam's article: Taner Akçam “A Short History of the Torossian Debate,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (2015): 345, and the corresponding articles by Edhem Eldem, Ayhan Aktar in a discussion *JGR*.

<sup>77</sup> See for example: Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*; Uğur Ümit Üngör, *The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Rebecca Jinks, “ ‘Marks Hard to Erase’ The Troubled Reclamation of ‘Absorbed’ Armenian Women, 1919–1927,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 1 (2018): 86–123.

<sup>78</sup> Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> See for instance: Hrayr S. Karagueuzian and Yair Auron, *A Perfect Injustice: Genocide and Theft of Armenian Wealth* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009); Uğur Ümit Üngör and Mehmet Polatel, *Confiscation and Destruction: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property* (London: Continuum, 2011); Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt, *The Spirit of Laws: the Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015) to mention only a few.

<sup>80</sup> Akçam and Kurt, *The Spirit of Laws*, 2.

Republic of Turkey today as an incentive for their genocide denial campaign. The last point feeds into the debate about interconnected modernities; a debate that specifically focuses on the continuity and transformation from Empire to Republic. Although the crimes were perpetrated by the declining Ottoman Empire, the fact that their actual beneficiary was the Republic of Turkey has driven successive Turkish governments to deny the genocide.

At the micro level of analysis, most of limited literature addresses the victims' voices, specifically oral interviews of the survivors and their descendants. The work of Bedross Der Matossian, Taner Akçam, Göçek, Donald Miller and Lorna Miller, Uğur Üngör, Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, all touch upon the victims' narrative of the 1915 genocide.<sup>81</sup> Göçek's most recent (2015) book, meanwhile, tapped into the memoirs of the perpetrators as individuals, which addresses a serious gap in the literature. On the other hand, developing a more substantial understanding of the perpetrators, and relying on their oral histories, seems unlikely to be accepted by the victims' groups and could be a source of denial.

### **Israel's Policy on the Armenian Genocide**

This section situates this thesis within the existing literature on Israel's foreign policy and the Armenian genocide. In more chronological fashion and more broadly regarding the concept of genocide, it could be useful to examine first what Israel's foreign policy was in relation to the UNGC. Rotem Giladi's work, for example, assesses Israel's formative years and highlights some key moments, such as the MFA's policy on the UNGC, apartheid in South Africa and the international refugee regime.<sup>82</sup> The common ground in all three of these topics is that they speak to the lessons of the WWII, and thus provoked Israel's active interest in shaping the international response.<sup>83</sup> Based on archival research in the ISA, Giladi showed how Israel's MFA mostly demonstrated an indifferent attitude to the universal values fostered by the UN, driven by ambivalence

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<sup>81</sup> See for example: Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*; Üngör, "Lost in Commemoration," 157–8; and most notable oral history book by Donald Miller and Lorna Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of The Armenian Genocide* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993)

<sup>82</sup> Rotem Giladi, "Not Our Salvation: Israel, the Genocide Convention, and the World Court 1950–1951," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26, no. 3 (2015): 473–93.

<sup>83</sup> Rotem Giladi, "A 'Historical Commitment'? Identity and Ideology in Israel's Attitude to the Refugee Convention 1951–4," *The International History Review* 37, no. 4 (2015): 745–67; Rotem Giladi, "Negotiating Identity: Israel, Apartheid, and the United Nations, 1949–1952," *The English Historical Review* 132, no. 559 (2017): 1440–472.

between a commitment to universal values and indifference, incredulity and even hostility, to the 1948 UNGC. Most importantly, as the state of asylum of the Jewish people, Israel showed particular attention to Jewish and Israeli interests within the refugee treaty but not to the universalism it represents. Three decades before the ‘Armenian question’ appeared on the international stage, the above represents an early indication of what might come in respect to Israel’s treatment of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide.

Summarised briefly in *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide* (2000), Yair Auron explores the bystander mind-set towards the Armenian genocide in Palestine during the period of the Jewish *Yishuv* (1896–1917).<sup>84</sup> Auron shows that the Zionist *Yishuv* was divided into two different bystander groups: The first, Ben Gurion and Ben Zvi’s mainstream Zionist movement and the second, *Netzah Yisrael Lo Yeshaker* (hereafter *NILI*).<sup>85</sup> While Ben Gurion took a pragmatically indifferent approach to the Armenian massacre, *NILI* spied on the Ottomans for the British during WWI and voiced concern about Ben Gurion’s Zionist-oriented denial of the Armenian genocide. The epilogue of Auron’s book focuses on Israeli foreign policy between 1945 and 1995, and seeks to portray Israel’s policy of non-recognition as immoral for a post-traumatic society.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, in this section of the book, Auron briefly mentioned the issue of Jewish refugees fleeing Iran and Syria (discussed in the third chapter of this thesis and in my 2015 journal article) but he marginalises the topic and discusses it in the context of a much later period (1990) with respect to a documentary on the Armenian genocide that aired on Israeli national television.<sup>87</sup>

Auron’s second contribution, *The Banality of Denial: Israel and the Armenian Genocide* (2003), addresses Israel’s ironclad denial of the Armenian genocide after the establishment of the state in 1948. Auron considered Israel’s denial policy to be a double standard. He argued that a post-traumatic society like Israel’s should, on moral grounds, recognise the Armenian genocide. Auron insists that the Jewish-Israeli slogan ‘Never Again’ should be humanity’s ‘Never Again.’ While assessing Israeli policy toward other genocides, the Armenian genocide rates special attention. Auron’s methodological analysis operates on two levels: the macro, assessing Israel’s foreign

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<sup>84</sup> Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*.

<sup>85</sup> NILI is a Hebrew abbreviation cited in Auron’s book which means the ‘Eternity (God) of Israel will not lie’.

<sup>86</sup> Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 351–61.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

policy, and the meso level, reviewing Israeli domestic politics, its education system, including academia, and the attitude of the Israeli public towards the Armenian genocide.

While one book cannot possibly address all the broad questions that need to be considered with respect to Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide, an in-depth examination of *The Banality of Denial* reveals a significant research gap in its lack of consideration of the late 1970s and 1980s, a period that spans a number of significant developments in the geopolitical realities of the Middle East, including with regard to the international awareness of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. Examining this period rather than later periods in Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide could provide an explanation as to why, and exactly how, the Israeli MFA responded to the Armenian campaign for recognition. Given that Israeli policy with respect to the Armenian genocide is characterised by continuity rather than change, i.e. no significant change since the 1980s to date, an examination of the late 1970s and 1980s could allow for a fuller understanding of the foundations of that policy.

For example, the 1982 Holocaust and genocide conference is one of the key moments for understanding Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide in the early 1980s. Specifically, in relation to the contested conference, Auran dismisses the thesis of Jewish refugees fleeing Iran and Syria as an incentive for Israel policy. He says: "it was explained by Israeli officials that supporting the Armenian issue could endanger the lives of Jews in Turkey, as well as in other countries" (saving Jews in Syria was mentioned once, as was saving Jews in Iran). The situation of saving Jewish refugees is sometimes described as a 'vital Israeli interest.'<sup>88</sup> Auran demurs:

We do not presume to judge if these issues are really in the 'vital interest' of Israel or the Jews. Suppose, however, the pretext of 'vital interest' was not used. What would Turkish-Israeli relations look like if Israel had explained from the beginning that the memory of genocide—*any genocide*—is not a negotiable issue in the relations between two sovereign states, especially when one of them is the country of the survivors of the Holocaust?<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Auran, *The Banality of Denial*, 66.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

This quotation from Auran's work implies that Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide was entirely devoid of a human rights perspective. That said, one could make an argument that Israel's policy of prioritising the wellbeing of Jews from Iran and Syria over recognising the Armenian genocide had a moral basis. As the work of Giladi has shown, Israel showed particular attention to Jewish and Israeli interests within the refugee treaty at the expense of the universalism the treaty represents. Indeed, Israel policy had long prioritised particular Jewish needs/interests versus the universal, and arguably we see this also in the case of the memory of the Armenian genocide.

The work of Zach Levey reveals a similar tension between universalism and particularism in Israel's approach to the Nigerian-Biafran civil war of 1967.<sup>90</sup> Two decades after WWII, and in the decade of Eichmann trial, the trauma of the Holocaust was very much embedded in Israeli memory culture, and the Biafran separatists reminded many Israeli MPs, public and press of the hardships the Jews had endured in Europe. At the same time, however, Israel was selling arms to Nigeria, which put the MFA in an extremely delicate position. The outcome was that Israel provided some humanitarian aid to the Biafrans while trying to prevent a rupture in the relations with Nigeria, which was inevitable. Levey's work here demonstrates how trying to juggle between universalism and particularism failed because the rupture with Nigeria was not prevented and the aid to the Biafrans was not enough to save their lives. This might be a useful context to understand why in what comes a decade later, when faced with a choice between the universalism of Armenians genocide versus the particularism of Jewish interests in the Middle East, the Israeli MFA chose the latter.

Reflecting on the work of Levey about the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, Gadi Heiman noted that the for a nation-state (Israel in this case) to be driven by its national interests could be considered a moral goal if it that would help ensure the interests of the security and well-being of the national community.<sup>91</sup> The Nigerian-Biafran civil war proves that the world is much more complicated and that between the ostensibly binary division of universal human rights values and the politicisation of genocide, there are substantial grey areas. This is an important example because it casts light on how the argument of this thesis unfolds in chapters four to eight. How and why Jewish

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<sup>90</sup> Zach Levey, "Israel, Nigeria and the Biafra civil war, 1967–70," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16:2-3, (2014): 263–80.

<sup>91</sup> Gadi Heiman, "Editor's Introduction" in *New Perspectives on the History of International Relations*, ed. Gadi Heiman (Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations Press, 2012), 5.

interests clash with universal values is discussed in the context of Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide.

Therefore, the above quotation by Auran is a missed opportunity in terms of addressing the research questions that emerge from the diplomacy of genocide and the broader geopolitical context of the late 1970s and the Middle East, specifically the Israeli-Turkish relations. This is at the heart of the research problem, when we understand that the memory of genocide is a negotiable and manipulative product in relations between sovereign states. The questions that need to be asked here, especially within the context of the 1970s and 1980s Cold War world order are: first, how did diplomats and their rhetoric leverage the notion of genocide, or its denial, to satisfy other/rival diplomats? And second, how did the Cold War world order drive the agencies of the nation state (Israel specifically), and especially great empires (their foreign offices and their diplomats) to acknowledge/deny a genocide?

More recently, the work of Yitzhak Mualem (2012) explores a hypothesis regarding the safety of Jewish communities in distress. Mualem's article examines the interconnections between Israel's arms trades and the safety of Jews in hostile countries. Mualem explores three Jewish communities in three different geographical areas, Ethiopia, Argentina and Iran. He argues that Israel's foreign policy uses its arms trades to improve its economic status, and equally importantly, to improve its diplomatic relations with countries so as to influence their treatment of their Jewish communities in distress.<sup>92</sup>

To this end, Mualem proposes that Israel's interconnections with the Jewish diaspora, specifically with Jewish communities in distress, is unique.<sup>93</sup> Mualem's innovative argument engages with my research project, specifically, with the third chapter, which focuses on the conference of 1982 and the task of protecting the lives of the Jewish refugees from Iran and Syria. Although Mualem demonstrates another immoral connection between the arms trade and protecting Jews in distress, my work might add another layer to this debate since my thesis argues that, among other factors, Israel was willing to 'sacrifice' the Armenian panels in the conference of 1982 to secure the safety of the Jews fleeing from Iran and Syria over the Turkish border.

Mualem's work addresses another meaningful research question with respect to

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<sup>92</sup> Yitzhak Mualem, "Israel's Foreign Policy: Military-Economic Aid and Assisting Jewish Communities in Distress – Can the Two Coexist?," *Israel Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2012): 213.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

Israel's foreign policy: to what extent does Israel conduct a Jewish foreign policy? This debate is gradually becoming significant in the literature on Israel's foreign policy. Rotem Giladi and Efrim Inbar both argue that, in many instances, Jewish solidarity is mere lip-service rather than actual policy.<sup>94</sup> Giladi goes on to show that in the formative years since Israel's establishment the country's elite have demonstrated delay, disinterest, indifference, even hostility to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, thus not manifesting universal values. Giladi begins his inquiry with a fundamental question regarding Israel's foreign policy: "Do universal values clash with Israel's particularism—itself an interpretation of recent and distant Jewish past—or do they derive from and resonate with such particularism?"<sup>95</sup> This is a highly relevant question that could help to pave the discussion further towards Israel's foreign policy in respect to genocide. i.e. the memory of the Israeli Holocaust and the assertion of its uniqueness represents that 'particularism' in Israel's foreign policy, vis à vis the concern with the Armenian genocide exemplifying here the universal values of genocide. Giladi's question is extremely relevant to chapters five and six in the thesis: Israeli diplomats implement an understanding that the more the emphasis is on the Armenian genocide, the less the emphasis is on the uniqueness on the Holocaust in the US political and cultural arena. Another historiographic approach seems to dominate the debate in a vast number of publications supporting the Jewish character of Israeli foreign policy. Scholars such as Michael Brecher, Shlomo Avineri, Moshe Zak, Aharon Klienman and others have argued against Inbar's and Giladi's premise, maintaining that Israeli foreign policy has been strongly shaped by Jewishness.<sup>96</sup> More recently, Dov Waxman and Scott Lasensky put forth an innovative thesis, which although it agrees with the latter group regarding the fact that there is a Jewish foreign policy, proposes that Jewish foreign policy is a broad concept. In their own words, "It is a complex, informal and decentralized system of ethno-nationalist foreign policy".<sup>97</sup> Waxman and Lasensky argue

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<sup>94</sup> Efraim Inbar, "Jews, Jewishness and Israel's Foreign Policy," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 2, no. 3–4 (1990): 179.

<sup>95</sup> Giladi, "A 'Historical Commitment'?",

<sup>96</sup> See for instance Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 229–44; Shmuel Sandler, "Is There a Jewish Foreign Policy?," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 4 (1987): 115–21, Shlomo Avineri, "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 37 (1986): 10–3, Moshe Zak, "The Jewish Consideration in Israel's Foreign Policy," *Gesher*, 30 (1984); and Aharon Klienman, *Israel and the World After 40 Years* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1990), 52–4.

<sup>97</sup> Dov Waxman and Scott Lasensky, "Jewish Foreign Policy: Israel, World Jewry and the Defence of 'Jewish Interests'," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12 no. 2 (2013): 232–25.

that taking care of Jewish interests is not limited to Israel's foreign policy, but is a policy also pursued by other non-governmental state institutions.

My thesis follows the narrative offered by Waxman and Lasensky to suggest that Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide is based on a more complex and inclusive understanding of Jewish interests. Specifically, the idea of a Jewish foreign policy does not include only Israel, but also encompasses the American Jewish organisations and the interests of the Turkish Jewish community.

### **Holocaust Scholarship and the Question of 'Uniqueness'**

Since three chapters of this thesis address key questions related to the memory of the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, a critical review of that scholarship is offered here. One major caveat should be noted at the outset: Holocaust scholarship is a highly developed and constantly growing field and, as such, this section of the review can only survey a small part of the literature. A huge amount of the literature is simply not relevant to this thesis. Instead, to keep the review as concise as possible, the focus is on a limited set of key questions that are pivotal to the field but also relevant to understanding how the contested memories of the Armenian genocide and the uniqueness of the Holocaust were leveraged from the late 1970s into the 1980s in Israel's foreign policy. Most of this section, therefore, reviews the degree to which Holocaust memory and its development in Israel and manifestations in the Western world, especially in the US, contributed to shaping Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide.

As a starting point to this section, in a broad overview, a new generation of scholars such as Donald Bloxham, Alon Confino, Mark Levene, Amos Goldberg, Daniel Blatman, Raz Segal, A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, have sought to expand the debate in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies, integrating that study within a broader discussion of global history. Specifically, the current generation of scholars sought to break the taboo that persisted through the 1960s to the 1990s of questioning the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust, which was to be studied as a separate category from other genocides.<sup>98</sup> The current stream in the literature aims to interconnect the Jewish

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<sup>98</sup> See for example: Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide* (New York: Palgrave, 2008); Daniel Blatman, "Holocaust Scholarship: Towards a Post-Uniqueness Era," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 1 (2014): 21–43.



genocide into a broader view of Modern European history, colonialism and the transformation from empires to the emergence of the modern nation state system.

The 'post uniqueness era' began in the early 2000s with two seminal publications by A Dirk Moses and Dan Stone. Both suggested the need to move beyond the suffering of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust or any victims' groups in any other genocide, towards the contextualisation of the Holocaust within the wider framework of colonial genocides of the 'racial century' (1850–1950), seeing the Holocaust therefore as the final phase of this century.<sup>99</sup> What was most important in that new approach to study Holocaust and genocide was the thesis advanced by Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Although Arendt conceptually separated the Holocaust from previous examples of genocide, she demonstrated a continuity from imperialism to fascism that was overlooked by scholars of the previous periods.<sup>100</sup>

The Holocaust, therefore, has been transformed from a German-Jewish affair to a global international one. As Bloxham puts it, "the history of the Holocaust is itself an international history, and international history always has a comparative dimension".<sup>101</sup>

This phrase of Bloxham's, along with the more recent work of Raz Segal, Mark Levene, and others, has sought to review the history of the Holocaust as a part of the integrated history of Europe, contextualising the traditional factor of antisemitism alongside economic incentives, nation-building, colonial expansion and the collapse of the previous world order of the European colonial empires.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 4 (2002): 7–36.

<sup>100</sup> Dan Stone, "The Historiography of Genocide: Beyond 'Uniqueness' and Ethnic Competition," *Rethinking History* 8, no. 1 (2004): 127–42. At the core of Arendt's book stands an argument which is referred to as the 'boomerang thesis', i.e. that European racial ideology of the nineteenth century was supplemented by totalitarianism as the leading political mode of that era, and driven by economic expansion into Africa and Asia, resulting ultimately in the worst possible horrors. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (New York: World Publishing Co., Meridian Books, 1958); Richard King and Dan Stone "Editors' Introduction", in *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide*, eds. Richard King and Dan Stone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 1.

<sup>101</sup> Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1. These ideas were expressed in his earlier writings, see for instance: Donald Bloxham "Britain's Holocaust Memorial Days: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present," *Immigrants & Minorities* 21, no. 1–2 (2002): 41–62.

<sup>102</sup> Raz Segal, "The Modern State, the Question of Genocide, and Holocaust Scholarship," *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 1 (2018): 108–33; Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide*.

## Developments of Holocaust Historiography and Memory in Israel

Broadly speaking, from the early 1950s up to the early 1990s, many American Jewish and Israeli scholars sought to situate the Holocaust as a distinct category of genocide. This generation of scholars, such as Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Gutman, Deborah Lipstadt, Leni Yahil, Lucy Dawidowicz, Steven Katz, Dan Michman and others, focused on the victim group to emphasise the suffering of the Jewish victims during the WWII. These scholars also perceived any debate on perpetrators or bystanders, as a threat to the uniqueness assertion.<sup>103</sup> As opposed to the limited writings on Armenian terror by Armenian scholars, in Holocaust historiography there is no clear dividing-line between ethnic identity and narrative position. As noted in the work of Karl Jaspers and Dan Diner, respectfully, constant questions of guilt could have driven (West) German historians to support the uniqueness assertion.<sup>104</sup> For example, the work of Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View* (1981) is an excellent example of a non-Jewish defender of the uniqueness claim.<sup>105</sup> An opposite example to Jäckel is the study by Arno J. Mayer, a Jewish American historian who argued that Jews were only a component in Hitler's anti-communist ideology.<sup>106</sup> Other German historians, such as Martin Broszat or American historians such as Raul Hilberg or Christopher R. Browning, hold a functionalist position with some similarities to Mayer's.

In relation to the Zionist world, and Israel specifically, within this school of Holocaust uniqueness scholars, a subgroup has developed since the 1950s. Survivor-scholars such as Israel Gutman, Shalom Cholawsky and Aharon Weiss shaped the Israeli realm of memory and set the initial research priorities.<sup>107</sup> Dalia Ofer and Boaz

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<sup>103</sup> See for example Israel Gutman, "On the Character of Nazi Antisemitism," in *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Exeter: Pergamon Press, 1988), 349–80; Yehuda Bauer, "Against Mystification: The Holocaust as a Historical Phenomenon," in *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, ed. Yehuda Bauer (Seattle: University of Seattle Press, 1978); Deborah Lipstadt, "Holocaust Denial and the Compelling Force of Reason," *Patterns of Prejudice* 26, no. 1–2 (1992): 64–76, to mention only a few.

<sup>104</sup> Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (Fordham University Press; 2nd edition, 2001); Dan Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 219.

<sup>105</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*, Translated by Herbert Arnold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>106</sup> Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?: The 'Final Solution' in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>107</sup> Yosef Michman (director of Yad Vashem, 1957 to 1960), Israel Gutman, Dov Kulka, Shalom Cholawsky, Zvi Bachrach, among others established Holocaust research in Israel. For the survivor-scholars literature see for example: Shalom Cholawsky, *City and Forest under Siege* (Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, 1973); Israel Gutman, *Warsaw: Ghetto Uprising* (Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Lochamei Ha'ghettaot, 1976).

Cohen, who have both researched extensively on this period, noted that the survivors did not just establish archives and databases, but in the late 1950s also created the foundations of Holocaust education in Israeli universities and the Zionist curriculums.<sup>108</sup>

As the work of Roni Stauber, Tom Segev, Boaz Cohen and others showed, since the mid-1950s the Israeli school of the uniqueness of the Holocaust also developed Yad Vashem as an institute to study the Holocaust as an academic discipline.<sup>109</sup> This school, shaped by Ben-Zion Dinur, the first director of Yad Vashem, (1953–1959), was influenced by the work of Dina Porat, Joseph Michman, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Gutman and others who sought to study the Holocaust as a distinct phenomenon from modern history, and focused on the Jewish victims and emphasised their multifarious voices, for example children and women, and spanning different geographical regions and periods. Although currently, in most of the Western world, and in the academic field of genocide studies, Holocaust uniqueness is a contested historiographical approach to the study of the Holocaust, since the 1950s, and especially during the 1970s and 1980s, it was the dominant approach to the study of the Holocaust in Israel. This thinking shaped Israeli memory culture which did not mirror the changes in Holocaust historiography elsewhere, and also became attached to changes in Israeli politics. Specifically, the ‘post uniqueness’ approach that in the early 1980s begun to develop in the US, especially within the USHMM commission, did not penetrate at all into Israel’s cultural memory of the Holocaust. Both Yad Vashem and the Israeli school of Holocaust historians rejected the developments in the field. As noted in the timely work of Amos Goldberg, even though Yad Vashem aims to act as a centre for the global memory of the Holocaust in the 21st century, still the museum functions as the dominant agent in Israel that shapes the memory, culture and politics of the country, in all of which the Holocaust is regarded as a unique event. According to Goldberg, Yad Vashem encourages visitors to identify with the Jewish victims and blocks any other

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<sup>108</sup> Dalia Ofer, “The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory,” *Israel Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–35; Dalia Ofer, “The Strength of Remembrance: Commemoration of the Holocaust during the First Decade of Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2000): 24–55. Also see Boaz Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research: Birth and Evolution* (London: Routledge, 2011), 25–36.

<sup>109</sup> Roni Stauber, *The Holocaust in Israeli Public Debate in the 1950s: Ideology and Memory* (London and Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007); Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); Cohen, *Israeli Holocaust Research*; James Young, *The Texture of memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and others.

more complex understanding of the events.<sup>110</sup>

This literature is highly relevant to this thesis because it fleshes out the Israeli memory culture of the 1970s and 1980, of which Yad Vashem was the flagship, and also shows how this culture penetrated into other Israeli institutions such as the Israeli Defence Forces (hereafter IDF) and most importantly the Israeli MFA. Not just Israeli high school and university students, but also IDF combatants, foreign diplomats, foreign heads of governments, and the Israeli diplomats themselves visited Yad Vashem as a core component of their education and training route. Furthermore, Yad Vashem and its historians were, and still are to some extent, dominant international agents of Holocaust memory, and the leading authority on Holocaust education in Israel.

Two additional milestones add further useful context into how and why the changes in Israeli memory culture did not mirror the changes in global Holocaust historiography, but were more closely attached to changes in Israeli politics. First was the Eichmann trial in 1961, which re-triggered Israeli awareness of the suffering of the European Jews and catapulted the suffering of the victims into mainstream cultural and political arenas. Second, and even more important was the 1967 Six-Day War. This war did not just change the borders of Israel until today, but also, as noted in the works of Yehuda Bauer, David Engel, Peter Novick, Tom Segev and others, led to a perception that it was a triumph that prevented ‘another Holocaust’, and an associated sense of legitimization for the Israeli territorial expansion and occupation in Palestinian territories. The metaphor of Israel as a country under blockade explains why and how the concept of uniqueness of the Holocaust was leveraged to support Israeli territorial expansion and for associated political, cultural, military and diplomatic ends.<sup>111</sup>

Moreover, during the 1980s, the voices of the second generation began to appear in Israeli Holocaust writings, movies and art to document the ‘new Jews’; i.e. those who had been born in Israel, and raised to parents who had survived the Holocaust, thereby

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<sup>110</sup> Amos Goldberg, “The ‘Jewish Narrative’ in the Yad Vashem Global Holocaust Museum,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 187–213.

<sup>111</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Idit Zartel, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), to mention a few.

living with the trauma and silence of their parents.<sup>112</sup> This second generation of Holocaust survivors is represented by scholars such as Tom Segev, Idith Zertal, Boaz Cohen and Dan Michman, who all wrote about the Holocaust and its appearance in Israeli politics, culture and memory. Although all of these are second generation to the survivors, these scholars do not belong to one stream of scholarship. Scholars such as Adi Ophir, Idith Zertal and Tom Segev represent the school of ‘new historians’ that challenge the Israeli Zionist narrative and the accounts of the wars of the period 1948–1967, and are critical of the Israeli memory of the Holocaust. Others, such as Dan Michman, represent the Yad Vashem school, even though he rejects the claim whether such a thing exists.<sup>113</sup>

The above discussion is highly relevant to the issues considered in this thesis. The writings of the offspring of Holocaust survivors articulate an important phase and voice in Israeli memory of the Holocaust because they reflect on how and why a whole generation of Israelis remembered and lived their lives in the shadows of the Holocaust during the 1960s and beyond. The emergence of these writings within the thesis timeline thus gives an analytical background to my evaluation of the primary sources, especially the elite oral interviews. In other words, the writings of second-generation Israeli Holocaust historians such as Tom Segev, Alon Confino, Idith Zertal, and others, do not just reflect on Holocaust memory culture in Israel but also mirror how many Israeli diplomats and IISO elite remember the Holocaust. These diplomats and IISO elite were not just wedded to Yad Vashem’s Holocaust memory culture but were also those who were pressured by Turkish MFA officials time and time again to protect the singularity of the Holocaust by aligning with the Turkish narrative of denial of the Armenian genocide. This is one of the focal points within the argument of this thesis.

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<sup>112</sup> Iris Milner, *Past Present: Biography, Identity and Memory in Second Generation Literature* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), [Hebrew]; Karol A. Kidron, “The Social Construct of Second Generation Survivors: Narratives of Support Groups for Bearers of Wounded Memory,” in *Childhood in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Survivor Children and the Second Generation* eds. Zahava Solomon and Julia Chaitin (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2007), [Hebrew]. David Grossmann, *See Under: Love* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), is the prime example.

<sup>113</sup> Dan Michman, “Is There an ‘Israeli School’ of Holocaust Research?” in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements* eds David Bankier and Dan Michman (New York: Berghahn Books Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 37–65. For example: Adi Ophir, “On Sanctifying the Holocaust: An Anti-Theological Treatise,” *Tikkun* 21, no. 6 (2006): 19–20; Segev, *The Seventh Million*; Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*.

## **The Geopolitics of Genocide in the Middle East: Armenian Terrorism as a Disputed Practice of Memory**

A second thematic gap in the *Banality of Denial* should be addressed; my project assesses Israeli policy in relationship to Armenian terrorism, specifically, the terrorist activities of ASALA. Although Auran addresses the fact that, since the 1980s, Turkey has increased its international advocacy, notably initiating Turkish studies programmes in American universities and research institutions, he does not address a critical research question: What drove the vigorous international Turkish campaign to deny the genocide launched in the early 1980s precisely? Why not for example earlier or later, say after 1990 when the Cold War had declined? In recent literature, it is argued that the ASALA campaign forced Turkey to face allegations of genocide for the first time since it was perpetrated during WWI, and it was this that underpinned Turkish attempts to establish and implement a counter narrative of denial.<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, research on Cold War history and terrorism (such as by Paul Wilkinson, Francis P. Hyland and Bruce Hoffman) has revealed the influence of Marxist-Leninist (and pro-Soviet) left-wing revolutionary ideology on ASALA.<sup>115</sup> Research also shows operational interconnections with organisations such as the Japanese Red Army, the June Movement and the Red Army Faction, as well as some Palestinian left-wing nationalist terrorist groups operating from the Middle East against Israeli targets, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (hereafter PFLP) and the PLO's Black September Organisation to mention a few. These works demonstrate a possible incentive for Israel to operate against Armenian radical groups.

As mentioned above, the political violence of the two Armenian organisations (ASALA and JCAG) has remained unstudied in the literature on modern Armenian history, and especially in the historiography of the Armenian genocide. This section, therefore, aims to explore what has been written about Armenian terrorism, whether implicitly or explicitly, and thus to identify the gaps in this existing work. This

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<sup>114</sup> For an excellent analysis of Turkish historical and contemporary denial, and especially the assessment of Turkish authorities in response to Armenian, terrorism see Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 428–56.

<sup>115</sup> See for example some works on these connections from the 1980s and 1990s such as Paul Wilkinson, "Armenian Terrorism," *The World Today* 39, no. 9 (1983): 346; or Francis P. Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism: the Past, the Present, the Prospects* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); more recently, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 2009).

engagement will be essential further to explain why ASALA's activities in the 1970s and 1980s provide a useful and fresh analytical tool to understand Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide.

Although this section evaluates more works that are affiliated with the 'western historiography' cluster which are reliable and based mainly on empirical research, not all of the work cited here belongs purely to this tradition. The logic behind this choice is that the period of Armenian terrorism is more complex than it first appears. More specifically, there is a certain paradox in terrorism perpetrated by a radical section of a victimised group in order to win acknowledgement as victims. This section does not, therefore, aim to get into simplistic distinctions between good victims and evil perpetrators, towards which some of the debates in the literature tend. Instead, it aims to determine how groups of scholars have tackled some particular perspectives on this sensitive issue to create an overall picture of the phenomenon and to explore the links between Armenian terrorism and the topic of this thesis: Israel's policy of non-recognition of the Armenian genocide.

### *The Historical Background of Armenian Terrorism*

This group of scholars argues that although the revolutionary left-wing wave of Armenian terrorism of 1975–1985 should be considered as the first example of modern terrorism perpetrated by Armenians, it should not be considered to be the first ever political violence perpetrated by Armenians. This phenomenon was in fact first launched almost a century earlier in 1890 by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (RPF). Scholars such as Francis P. Hyland, Paul Wilkinson, Michael Bobelian and Khachig Tololyan have studied the historical roots of Armenian political violence. Under this line of argumentation for instance, Khachig Tololyan maintains that although the RPF perpetrated some violence in specific cases, it was mainly developed as a transnational political party which unified Armenians in regions such as the Ottoman and Tsarist Empires before 'terror become part of its political arsenal'. In contrast, in Tololyan's opinion, this important political characteristic was absent from ASALA, which was a more 'pure' terrorist organisation. More generally though, it indicates that Armenians had established terrorism as a political tool long before the emergence of ASALA and JCAG, and therefore, it was not a new phenomenon in the modern history of Armenians.

*The Republic of Turkey's Attitude to Armenian Terrorism*

Examining the Armenian political violence against the Turkish Republic in the 1970s and 1980s has been an area of study hitherto occupied exclusively by Turkish scholars. Scholars such as Taner Akçam, Yılmaz Öztuna and, more recently, Doğan Gürpınar and Tunç Aybak, have studied the Turkish authorities' reactions to Armenian terrorism.<sup>116</sup> One of the most notable Turkish MFA and military elite reactions to the wave of Armenian terrorism was the establishment of the Institute of Turkish Studies, located in Washington, D.C. In this specific context, Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen and Robert Jay Lifton have stated in their work that the "memorandum and letters that we reproduce in full provide the first direct evidence of the close relationship between the Turkish government and one such institute".<sup>117</sup> The authors show how the Institute of Turkish Studies was financially sponsored by the Turkish government and that its researchers were closely involved with writing studies that supported the denialist narrative. Ultimately, however, Smith et al do not mention that it was Armenian terrorism that drove the establishment of the Institute of Turkish Studies in 1982. This omits an important context and the relationship between cause and effect. While there is no doubt regarding Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide, there is no reason not to acknowledge Armenian terrorism as a factor provoking Turkish denial. This thesis, therefore, seek to address this gap and thus to show the intimate connections between Turkey's denial narrative, Armenian terrorism and Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide.

Turkish liberal scholar, Tunç Aybak, recently held that "until the mid-1960s state elites, diplomats, the media and historians in Turkey maintained a collective social amnesia and largely ignored the crimes committed against the Armenian populations as an integral part of Turkish history". Further, Aybak recalls that the 50th anniversary of the genocide in 1965 was commemorated by the Armenian diaspora in Lebanon. The major development, Aybak proposes, was when ASALA emerged in the early 1970s, which caused the first crack in the Turkish wall of silence. According to Aybak, "the terrorist attacks prompted the Turkish government to provide additional training for

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<sup>116</sup> See Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 428–56.

Yılmaz Öztuna, "The Political Milieu of the Armenian Question," in *Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* ed. Türkkaya Ataöv (Ankara: Culture, Art and Publications, 2001), 43–64. See also Akçam, *From Empire to Republic*, ix, And Gürpınar, "The Manufacturing of Denial," 126.

<sup>117</sup> Smith et al., "Professional Ethics," 1–22.



Turkish diplomats and officials encourage historians and intellectuals of statecraft to respond to the Armenian claims of genocide as a ‘problem’ of the Turkish state”.<sup>118</sup>

In a personal account, Aybak recalls that prospective young Turkish diplomats were instructed to attend a newly introduced seminar in the faculty entitled ‘the Armenian Question’ (*‘Ermeni Sorunu’*).<sup>119</sup> The seminars were taught by retired Turkish ambassadors. These limited accounts that examine the Turkish official and unofficial responses to Armenian terrorism shed some light on the defensive approach Turkey’s state institutions took regarding the Armenian question and the allegations of genocide. I will revisit these in the course of the first part of the thesis.

### *Armenian Terrorism and Armenian Diaspora Relations*

This group of scholars deal with the Armenian diaspora’s reactions to Armenian terrorism between 1975 and 1985. Andrew Mango, Anat Kurts and Ariel Merari, Yossi Shain, Razmik Panossian, Thomas de Waal, Michael Bobelian and Khachig Tololyan each attempt to discuss the somewhat complex attitude of the Armenian diaspora to the wave of terrorism (1973–1985). Armenian political scientist Razmik Panossian explores how Armenian terrorism and ASALA were viewed by Armenian diaspora groups. After briefly outlining the roots and the activity of Armenian terrorism (ASALA and JCAG), Panossian notes that “most diasporans found terrorist attacks against civilians repugnant, but a good number of Armenians showed some sympathy for acts committed against Turkish diplomats”.<sup>120</sup> As Panossian points out, even though elements of the Armenian diaspora were sympathetic towards the assassinations perpetrated against Turkish diplomats, the Armenian terrorist attacks were also a source of dispute among a large proportion of the diaspora because of the innocent lives taken by the terrorists. This is an important insight which sheds some new light upon the views of Armenian terrorism within the Armenian diaspora.

In this complex context, the failure of most genocide scholars of Armenian background, all of whom were born and raised in diaspora communities, to address directly the period of Armenian terrorism, is something of an enigma. While the impact

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<sup>118</sup> Aybak, “Geopolitics of Denial,” 126.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> See for example Andrew Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror. For Forty Years We Fought Alone* (London: Routledge, 2005); Razmik Panossian and Michael J. Dwyer, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Publishers, 2006), 311; Thomas de Waal, *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 157.

of Armenian terrorism on Turkish denial is a critical point, prominent Armenian scholars who have published extensively on the Armenian genocide, such as Bedross Der Matossian, Richard Hovannisian, Raymond Kévorkian, Vahakn N. Dadrian, Simon Payaslian and many others, have left terrorism and ASALA completely out of their research agenda. There are several reasons why Armenian scholars have tended to avoid discussing Armenian terrorism. It may be because this period is an unflattering episode in the modern history of Armenia, or perhaps the violence seemed low scale and marginal to the other commemorative efforts within the Armenian struggle to achieve recognition. I suggest, however, that this period of Armenian terrorism is more relevant to the geopolitics of the Middle East than it first appears. More specifically, there is a certain paradox in terrorism perpetrated by a radical section of a victimised group in order to win acknowledgement as victims. This section aims to determine how groups of scholars have tackled this sensitive issue in order to create an overall picture of the phenomenon. This important first step towards understanding this overlooked phenomenon underpins two of the chapters in this thesis.

Perhaps the only exception to this rule is Ronald Suny, in his most recent publication *They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else* (2015). Suny asserts in his bibliographical discussion, “Actions of Armenian terrorists from 1973 into the early 1980s brought the issue to public attention, but scholarship lagged far behind the agitated public consciousness”.<sup>121</sup> Although Suny identifies that gap in the literature, neither he nor other Armenian scholars or regional experts working on this period, have engaged with these issues critically in subsequent work.

Following the core line of argument in this section, the complexity of the attitude to Armenian terrorism between 1973 and 1985 is understood. On the one hand, the Armenian diaspora sought to bring their tragedy to the world’s attention and to gain acknowledgment of the genocide and reparations from the Turkish Republic. On the other hand, as some accounts have pointed out, some of the diaspora’s communities, in particular those who were part of the Western bloc, had a problem with aligning themselves as supporters of the violent and terrorist component of the Armenian campaign. One can postulate, therefore, that although those few Armenian historians who have addressed this period of terrorism in their writings they actually have tended to downplay its significance, mainly because they understand its complexity, as noted

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<sup>121</sup> Suny, *They Can Live*, 369.

above.

### *Reactions of the International Community to Armenian Terrorism*

This is one of the most understudied perspectives in the literature of the Armenian terrorism, with relevant work mainly authored by Donald Bloxham and Fatma Göçek Andrew Mango, and Christopher J. Walker. Bloxham and Göçek, for example, argue that the political violence launched by ASALA and JCAG against innocent Turkish diplomats in the 1970s and 1980s provided Turkish governments with a narrative to distract attention from the ‘so called’ genocide. Bloxham and Göçek conclude that the Armenian violence polarised the Turkish narrative towards a total denial of the 1915 massacre.<sup>122</sup>

Donald Bloxham’s *The Great Game of Genocide* addresses, among other related issues concerning the 1970s and 1980s Armenian genocide campaign, ‘the geopolitics of memory’. Bloxham proposes that the media coverage in Western countries of ASALA’s assassinations of fifty Turkish diplomats “was not everything that the terrorists would have wished for”. Bloxham assesses that ASALA’s activity served merely to shift the discussion regarding the 1915 genocide in Western countries from ‘certainties’ of the events of 1915 as genocide, to a ‘language of disputed history’ between the Armenians and the Turks regarding an ‘uncertain past’.<sup>123</sup> Bloxham’s nuanced critique focuses, in other words, on the ‘boomerang effect’ of ASALA’s terrorism but most importantly shows how the ASALA terrorist campaign was leveraged by of Turkish MFA to a contested history between the Armenians and the Turks regarding the events of 1915.

Importantly, Christopher J. Walker adds that one could have asserted that the Armenians only turned to terror and violence in the 1970s and 1980s having tried to employ peaceful methods to commemorate the 1915 Armenian genocide. As Walker noted, however, “no serious political campaign had ever been launched. [...] The Armenians have only just, in the late 1980s, begun putting together the beginnings of a systematic account of the genocide of 1915–16”.<sup>124</sup>

The third chapter of this thesis builds on the above analyses offered by Walker and Bloxham to give a further systemic analysis of the degree to which Armenian

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<sup>122</sup> Bloxham and Göçek, “The Armenian Genocide,” 349.

<sup>123</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 207–35.

<sup>124</sup> Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Routledge 1980), 380.

terrorism did not bring the positive attention the Armenians so desired. The chapter shows how the Armenians' violent attempt to restore the memory of the forgotten genocide provided the Turkish MFA and its Cold War allies, including Israel, an easy way to situate the Armenian campaign within their wider fight on global and regional terrorism. In addition, by exposing the links and cooperation between Armenian and Palestinian terrorists, and their affiliation to the Soviet Union, the Israeli MFA was able to present both Turkey and the US with a cogent argument that this was a shared fight that required cooperation. This played into the hands of Israel's MFA, which used this incredible opportunity to restore relations with Turkey while also strengthening its fight against regional Palestinian terrorism.

In summary, even though ASALA and Armenian terrorism has not received much attention in the Armenian genocide literature compared to other themes, the limited work that has been done on this topic suggests the following three preliminary insights. First, Armenian terrorism was not a new phenomenon, but a renewed campaign inspired by the claims of genocide. Second, in relation to Bloxham and Göçek's analysis, and the paradox of the boomerang effect, the anti-Turkish, anti-Western aspirations of ASALA possibly later backfired on the Armenians in terms of their wish to gain recognition for the 1915 genocide from Western parties and parliaments. Third, the somewhat negative perception of the terrorist campaign among the Armenian diaspora.

### **The Geopolitics of Genocide in the Middle East: The 1982 Conference on Holocaust and Genocide**

This debate needs to link more tightly to the pressure surrounding the 1982 Holocaust and genocide conference. Although this has been problematised in a handful of works, there remains a gap in research in respect to our understanding of the event, especially from the perspective of Israel's foreign policy and the important context of the changing alliances in the late Cold War and the realities of the New Middle East. To begin with, Israel Charny (1983) expanded on some of the insights he could offer having been part of the conference steering committee.<sup>125</sup> Although Charny's double volume book gives

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<sup>125</sup> Israel W. Charny, Shama Davidson, and Edna Kennan, eds., *The Book of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide* (Tel-Aviv: Institute of International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, 1982), 270–71.

a snapshot of the events of the conference, it does so mainly from the steering committee viewpoint. What is missing is the behind-the-scenes diplomatic engagements with the Israeli MFA.

Among the works on the Armenian genocide, Donald Bloxham's *Great Game of Genocide* (2005) and Ronald Suny's *They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else* (2016) touch upon the topic very briefly as related to the international (lack of) awareness of the Armenian genocide during the Cold War.<sup>126</sup> Both works did briefly discuss the conference as a key episode of the 1980s in relation to the growing dispute between Turks and Armenians, but in the context of a number other factors and events, such as the USHMM.

A more substantial, yet fragmented, assessment of the conference and its circumstances is provided by Yair Auron. This mainly served to introduce readers to the conference of 1982 as another obvious opportunity for Israel and the MFA to deny the existence of the Armenian genocide for the sake of Israeli relations with Turkey.<sup>127</sup> As we have seen though, Auron dismisses the possibility of any connection between the conference and the efforts to rescue the Syrian and Iranian Jews, since, in Auron's view, this was not a vital enough interest compared with Israel's moral commitment as a country built on the ashes of the Holocaust to acknowledge other genocidal episodes. In this thesis, the chapter on the 1982 conference contests this viewpoint.

In *Model Citizens of the State* (2012), Rifat Bali surveys the events surrounding the conference, mainly from Jewish/Israeli perspectives. Bali's short section on the issue examines the events from three main perspectives: first, that of the Turkish Jews who pressured Charny and the other members of the conference steering committee to cancel the Armenian genocide papers; second, the harm to Israeli-Turkish relations, which were deteriorating at the time; and last, to point to the concerns over the safety of Jews in Turkey and Jews fleeing from Iraq, Syria and Iran through Turkey's eastern and southern borders.<sup>128</sup> Although Bali's work questions some of Auron's assertions, and while it surveys the crisis from a Jewish/Israeli perspective, as does this chapter, it lacks a critical analysis of unstudied empirical sources from Israeli/Jewish archives to explain the decision making of the Israeli/Jewish leadership.

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<sup>126</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 219; Suny, *They Can Live*, 370.

<sup>127</sup> Auron, *Banality of Indifference*, 359; Auron *Banality of Denial*, 66.

<sup>128</sup> Rifat Bali, *Model Citizens of the State The Jews of Turkey during the Multi-Party Period* (Vancouver: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 272–74.

Furthermore, it is important to outline here that Auron, Charny and Bali each focus on the way in which the issues with the conference were reported in the international media. The scandal was introduced to the public as a controversial event that could jeopardise the life of Jews, especially the Jewish community in Turkey, which were described in this short list of publications as ‘vital Jewish interests’.<sup>129</sup> The vague phrasing of ‘vital Jewish interests’, or ‘humanitarian interests of Jews’ and the scholars’ speculation regarding this issue cannot be a satisfying alternative to thorough historical inquiry. In fact, given the considerable methodological limitations this topic faces, there are deeper meanings in this issue that one must thoroughly investigate in order to understand the wider question of Israel’s treatment of the Armenian genocide in the last decade of the Cold War. This is a substantial gap in our knowledge because without a full understanding of the reasons why Israel and the Jewish lobbies (in Turkey and US) acted against the conference, those actions simply appear as disproportional pressure against an academic conference. A full appreciation of the circumstances will reveal that what was really at stake here was much more substantial.

More recently, the work by Vahagn Avedian examines the 1982 conference from the perspective of Armenian contemporary history. Avedian sees the conference as the first major international academic forum to discuss the Armenian genocide in the age of terrorism by ASALA and the Cold War polarisation of Armenian diaspora.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Avedian represents an important first step in highlighting the polarisation between Armenian diaspora groups regarding how to achieve memory of the genocide. My own first take on the 1982 conference, ‘A Unique Denial: Israel’s Foreign Policy and the Armenian Genocide’ (2015), published before I started my doctoral research, also focuses on this conference.<sup>131</sup> Due to the methodological challenges noted earlier, and since I was writing that article during 2014, I did not have access to some further archival files related to this conference, which were retrieved at a later date, nor to

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<sup>129</sup> For the unspecified threat see Ibid., 275; and it is stated vaguely in the conference book by Charny that there is a general danger to ‘a grave threat to Jewish interests’. For the more specified threat yet not explicit on Jews see “The Humanitarian interests of Jews,” see “Israelis Said to Oppose Parley after Threat to Turkish Jews,” *The New York Times* (June 3, 1982). See also Auron, *The Banality of Denial*, 66, who also describes the ‘Jewish interests’ in respect to Israeli Turkish relations and the Armenian Genocide as ‘mysterious’.

<sup>130</sup> Vahagn Avedian, “Knowledge and Acknowledgement the Politics of Memory of the Armenian Genocide” (Ph.D. diss., University of Lund, 2017). Avedian referred to the conference of 1982 as “The Entry into the Academics,” 188.

<sup>131</sup> Eldad Ben-Aharon, “A Unique Denial: Israel’s Foreign Policy and the Armenian Genocide” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2015): 638–54.

several oral accounts, in Hebrew, from ex-*Mossad* Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (hereafter IISO) members and Israeli MFA staff who were in Ankara and Istanbul at the time of the conference. More importantly, I could not yet properly show how the conference helped to solve the bigger research puzzle of the period under question and thus to establish connections to the rescue operations by the IISO within the nexus of deteriorating relations between Ankara and Jerusalem and ASALA's political violence against Turkish diplomats. This connection, however, is properly made in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

These short historiographical notes indicate the complexity of the research setting, due to the variety of activities involving Israel's MFA and the IISO, the Turkish MFA interests, and by contrast, the conference organisers, the Turkish and American Jews, and the Armenian genocide memory. This chapter, however, maintains a focus on the Israeli/Jewish perspective and on the issue of the protection of Jewish refugees. These issues are highlighted as the main premise of the chapter, along with Armenian and Turkish perspectives of the event side by side. It therefore fills a number of research gaps: first and foremost, expanding on what was going on behind the scenes of the conference between the organising committee, the MFA and Turkish Jewish elite; second, evaluating how the inclusion of the Armenian genocide in the conference could have negatively affected the rescue operations; third, and most importantly, contextualising the issue of the rescue and defence of Jews as part of a myth of Turkey's 'humanitarian foreign policy', going on to explore how this policy was used in the context of the conference, but also in the context of the USHMM and the European Parliament resolution in 1987. This chapter critically tests this assertion showing that when it comes to acknowledging Turkey's own dark past the 'humanitarian foreign policy' fell away. Fourth, the chapter aims to highlight the effect of the deteriorating relations between Ankara and Jerusalem and, subsequently, the ASALA assassination at the time of the conference, on the Israeli decision to pressure the conference steering committee. Lastly, the chapter examines the methodological issues in properly studying the important mission of Israel in respect to rescuing and defending Jews, and how this has shaped the nation's foreign policy.

## **The Armenian Genocide Between Washington and Strasbourg: USHMM, The Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide as Integrated History?**

In the context of the section regarding Israel's memory culture of the Holocaust, it is worth recalling that the 1982 conference, which offered a comparative perspective on the Holocaust and genocide, was unacceptable to many senior scholars of this period. Most importantly, the 1982 conference was built upon the foundations of the intention of the 'Presidential Commission on the Holocaust' established by the US President Jimmy Carter in November 1978 which was tasked with offering the president a plan for how to formulate the Holocaust days of remembrance, shaping the education and memory of the Holocaust in the American public sphere. The committee members included, among others, Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel and Benjamin Meed, American senators and Jewish American Congress members such as Stephan Solarz, Jewish-American journalists such as Hayman Bookbinder and academic specialists on the Holocaust such as Professor Raul Hilberg, each of whom contributed their own expertise and insights to the initial planning of the memorial.

The work of Peter Novick, for example, outlines how memory of the Holocaust was marginalised in American culture between the 1950s and the 1970s. The trauma of the survivors and the repressed memory of the American Jews themselves limited the visibility of the Holocaust in American Jewish communities during the period under discussion.<sup>132</sup> An additional explanation for the Holocaust not being part of the Jewish identity of American Jews during the initial post-war decades, as noted by both Novick and Hasia Diner, is Jewish demography. In the late 1940s, only one hundred thousand Holocaust survivors emigrated to the US, representing only a relatively minor addition to the existing population of American Jews.<sup>133</sup>

In some contrast to the Israeli memory culture of the Holocaust in that same period, therefore, the Holocaust remained quite remote from American culture, and was definitely not commemorated during that period as 'unique'. This matters because when one comes to the question of whether to exclude other ethnic minorities from the USHMM, especially the Armenians, Novick's and Diner's works could cast light on why the American Jews were not as highly motivated as Israeli MFA and the Turkish

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<sup>132</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury 2000), 6.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 278; and Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 245.



Jews to block the Armenians. Furthermore, it should be noted that in line with US foreign policy in the latter half of the 1970s, the memorial was also seeking to highlight the US' commitment to the prevention of genocide and the promotion of human rights. Given all the above, and quite differently from Yad Vashem's narrative and the focus on the Jewish victims, the American narrative of the USHMM was quite different. This important point is explored further in the USHMM chapter as a possible explanation for why the American Jews exhibited little inclination to help the MFA to exclude the Armenians from the USHMM.

One of the first and fundamental problems of the prospective project was that it provoked a major dispute concerning who should be regarded as victims of the Holocaust, as noted above. Was it only Jews, or should non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, such as Roma, homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses and the disabled, be included in the exhibition narrative? This debate also opened the wider question of whether the memorial should include victims of other genocides, as part of an attempt to prevent future genocides and highlight the modern commitment to human rights. Turning to the literature on the USHMM, broadly speaking, one can identify an extensive literature focusing on the memory of the Holocaust around the globe since the early 1990s, exemplified by work such as that of Judith Miller, Edward T. Linenthal, Harold Kaplan, James E. Young, Tim Cole, Peter Novick, Nurith Ben-Bassat and others.<sup>134</sup> For example, the meticulous work by Edward T. Linenthal is a milestone in this literature, setting out the years of planning involved in establishing the USHMM and casting an insider's light on the domestic American disputes regarding what, and who, should be remembered in the memorial. Linenthal studied the developments of the USHMM for more than a decade, by sitting in the exhibition design committee meetings, and by assessing a range of planning records. As Linenthal argued, alas, the only thing that the

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<sup>134</sup> See for example Harold Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust* (Chicago: Chicago university Press, 1994); Tim Cole, *Images of the Holocaust* (London: Duckworth, 1999); Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*; Samuel Totten, "Paying Lip Service to R2P and Genocide Prevention: The Muted Response of the US Atrocities Prevention Board and the USHMM's Committee on Conscience to the Crisis in the Nuba Mountains," *Genocide Studies International* 8, no. 1 (2014): 23–57; Zachary Albert, "Exhibiting the Holocaust, Exhibiting the Self: Museum Tour Narratives and Post-Holocaust American Identity," *Museums & Social Issues* 8, no.1–2 (2013): 47–58; Judith Miller, *One, By One, By One: Facing the Holocaust* (New York: Simon and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990); Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*; Joy Sather-Wagstaff and Rebekah Sobel, "From Memory to Action: Multisited Visitor Action at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Museums & Social Issues* 7, no. 2 (2012): 179–91; Nurith Ben-Bassat, "Holocaust Awareness and Education in the United States," *Religious Education* 95, no. 4 (2000): 402–23.

commission could agree upon back in the late 1970s was the need for ‘days of remembrance’ for the Jewish genocide.<sup>135</sup>

The careful attention given by Linenthal to the question of the Armenian genocide, can be found under the heading ‘the boundaries of inclusion’. Linenthal argues that the other parts of the memorial, such as the centre to study the Holocaust and genocide, focused on the educational message of the museum and were thus more flexible in respect to containing other victims of other genocide, among them the Armenians.<sup>136</sup> This chapter engages with Linenthal’s analysis, specifically with how he has assessed some of the background to and local engagements of the USHMM in its early years and the ‘the boundaries of inclusion’ in respect to the Armenian genocide.

Driven by the impact of Linenthal's work, this strand in the literature was prominent in the 1990s and extended into public debates and popular American culture, stretching from that period into the new millennium, questioning whether the Holocaust is a unique phenomenon and whether it should be accorded a special status as an exemplary historical account through which the suffering of the Jewish victims is remembered and taught.<sup>137</sup> The work of Yair Auron, Marcia Sachs Littell, Samuel Totten and Nurith Ben-Bassat, for example, explored these issues, especially in respect to understanding how the USHMM served as an educational tool designed to boost the awareness of genocide and human rights.<sup>138</sup>

Importantly, this chapter on the USHMM should be situated closely with the recent works by A. Dirk Moses, Rifat Bali and Jacob S. Eder, each of which addresses how competition among victims of genocide in the late Cold War and post-Cold War periods intensified the lobbying in North America with respect to the commemoration

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<sup>135</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 35–51.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>137</sup> For more on this see, for example, Auron, *Banality of Denial*, 138–43; Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), to mention only a few.

<sup>138</sup> In this context see, for example, the work of Nurith Ben-Bassat, “Holocaust Awareness and Education in the United States,” *Religious Education* 95, no. 4 (2000): 402–23 and Marcia Sachs Littell, “Breaking the Silence: A History of Holocaust Education in America,” in *Remembrance, Repentance, Reconciliation: The 25th Anniversary Volume of the Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and Churches*, ed. Douglas F. Tobler (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 195–212; and Samuel Totten “Holocaust Education in the United States,” in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. Walter Lacqueur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 305–12.

activities of the Jewish Holocaust and the question of its uniqueness.<sup>139</sup> The work of Moses is important in showcasing the ethnic competition surrounding a museum similar to USHMM, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (hereafter, CMHR) in multicultural Canada. Moses recounts how the dilemma between education about human rights put forward by the Canadian government and memorialisation by ethnic victim groups could affect the controversy surrounding the museum's narrative and the 'victimisation hierarchy'. In other words, locating the Holocaust above all other victims of genocide invited constant tension among the various cultural groups of Canada's population. Each of these ethnic groups wished to be included in the Canadian-based museum, based on its remit to place the human suffering of all victims as the primary lesson of the museum. More importantly, Moses' work underlines another dilemma which was noted at the outset of this chapter, regarding the public funding of a such a state memorial. Moses concluded that when the CMHR's intention to highlight memorialisation of the suffering of each victim group as its core narrative became public, more victim groups in multicultural Canada tried to secure space in the exhibitions by utilising funds from private donors. By contrast, when the intention was to put forward the human rights lesson, the motivation of private donors to fund the museum reduced, which had an adverse impact on the CMHR's financial state.<sup>140</sup>

The late Cold War context was explored in the works of Rifat Bali and more recently by Jacob S. Eder, each of whom demonstrates how the USHMM provoked heated competition among ethnic groups, which was leveraged to international relations, and led to international governments, institutions and transnational organisations intervening in the museum's substance. Bali's work for example, underlines how the initiation of the USHMM stimulated, alongside other Armenian commemorative activities, an intensive Turkish campaign to deny their involvement in a genocide, focused here on efforts by the Turkish MFA, diplomats and the Turkish-Jewish elite, to change the initial decision to include the 1915 genocide in the exhibition.<sup>141</sup>

Bali's premise is somewhat different from this chapter's focus. Bali approached

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<sup>139</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: the 'Uniqueness of the Holocaust' and the Question of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 215–38; Bali, *Model Citizens of the State*; Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>140</sup> Moses, "The Canadian Museum," 233–34.

<sup>141</sup> Bali, *Model Citizens*, 231–32.

the USHMM issue from a holistic approach that examines Turkish foreign policy from the aftermath of WWII into the early millennium, tapping into a number of milestones in Turkish-American relations. Furthermore, Bali assesses the important ‘jobs’ assigned to the Turkish Jews as a lever in Turkish foreign policy, hence the title of the book: ‘model citizens of state’ which refers to the Turkish Jews as the ‘model ethnic minority’ who could help Turkey give a positive spin to the accusations of genocide, or criticisms of its current human rights record in respect to the Armenians and the Kurds. Bali certainly provides an important overview but does not use this analysis to emphasise the degree to which Turkey’s campaign in the US against the Armenian genocide accusations could also cast new light on the late Cold War dynamics between the US and Turkey. This analysis, through the proxy of the issues surrounding the USHMM, is clearly also important in order to understand the Israeli-Turkish-American relations in the late Cold War period. This chapter, therefore, will engage with Bali’s analysis but specifically highlight it in a Cold War context in order to showcase that the treatment of Turkish Jews as a favourite minority should be analysed in the context of the Middle Eastern front of the Cold War, the American-Turkish NATO alliance and specifically the crisis years in Israeli-Turkish relations.

More recently, the work of Jacob S. Eder examines how the Federal Republic of Germany (hereafter FRG), another US Cold War ally, engaged with the USHMM initiative for more than a decade (1979–1993). Eder’s work argues in essence that the West German government, especially during Chancellor Kohl’s administration (1982–1988), saw themselves as ‘victims’ of the Holocaust’s afterlife in the US. Eder’s specific chapter ‘Confronting the Anti-German Museum: (West) Germany and the USHMM, 1979–1993’ taps into the track II diplomacy pursued by Helmut Kohl’s government, which was terrified that the museum would propagate a militantly anti-German narrative in the heart of the capital of West Germany’s most important Cold War ally. As a US-based memorial, the history of the US as the liberators of the Nazi concentration camps was magnified and become a dominant feature of the USHMM according to Eder, whereas the totality of German history was condensed to the miserable and murderous 1933–1945 Nazi dictatorship. Such a Jewish-American narrative—according to Kohl—dismissed the great achievements of the FRG since 1949, namely the establishment of liberal democracy, and the binding of its destiny

with the West, specifically the US.<sup>142</sup> The FRG employed German diplomats and non-governmental officials to penetrate the USHMM planning committee, and thus influence the narrative of the prospective museum. Eder captured the essence of the FRG's concerns with a quote from Hubertus von Morr, a German official and one of Kohl's closest advisers: "We cannot understand why America wants its young people to go to that museum [USHMM] and come out saying, 'My God, how can we be allies with that den of devils?'"<sup>143</sup>

Kohl's anxieties fit very well with Turkey's concern regarding the contested memories of the Armenian genocide and Turkey's reputation in the US, as described earlier. In fact, von Morr's quotation above could easily capture the concerns of Turkish government officials during the 1980s, especially those of Turgut Özal's government of the mid-1980s which was pro-Western. As this chapter will showcase in its empirical part, the inclusion of the 'alleged' Armenian genocide in the USHMM could have serious consequences for US-Turkish relations and thus for Israeli-Turkish relations. Arguably, putting together the funding dilemma highlighted in Moses's analysis, and Eder's premise about FRG, highlights the contentious nature of the history of the USHMM. In other words, Turkey faced the same problem as FRG as a powerful Cold War ally: the golden opportunity that the public funding provided for the Armenian Americans could have severely damaged the already problematic reputation of Turkey in the US, and with it the Cold War alliance with the Americans, making Turkey, like the FRG, a 'victim' of the USHMM.

All in all, this is the focal point in chapter five of the thesis. The Israeli memory culture of the uniqueness of the Holocaust intersects with the diplomacy of genocide as played out in the USHMM. Specifically, the pressure exerted by the Turkish MFA on the Israeli diplomats as offspring of Holocaust survivors charged with preserving the uniqueness of the Holocaust, served Turkey well as a way of avoiding their possible representation as perpetrators of genocide in the federal museums of their most important Cold War ally.

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<sup>142</sup> Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 84.

<sup>143</sup> Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen: 1982–1990* (Munich: Droemer, 2005), 134, cited in: Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 84.

## **The Armenian Genocide Between Washington and Strasbourg: 1987 Armenian Genocide Bills in the European Parliament and the U.S. Congress**

Following the above analysis, the growing transatlantic tension during the ‘second Cold War’ regarding human rights protection and commitment to the Helsinki Accords is key to the third and final part of the thesis, especially to chapter six. As much as these insights are important to understand relations between the US and Western European relations during the mid-late 1980s, the literature on the 1987 Armenian genocide bills in the UP and the U.S. Congress is quite limited in scope. Only a handful of works have addressed those resolutions. These works have only addressed the 1987 bills as part of a survey of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in the late 1980s. The works of Donald Bloxham, Jennifer Dixon, Julien Zarifian and Christopher Walker have mentioned the topic in their work but did not consider human rights and the Helsinki process.<sup>144</sup> The work of Julien Zarifian, for example, has outlined the US foreign policy in respect to the Armenian genocide but only devotes two short lines discussing the affairs of 1987, simply asserting that “Another attempt was blocked in 1987”.<sup>145</sup> According to Zarifian, the 1987 resolution was just one of a few occasions in which the House of Representatives adopted the resolution only for the Senate to reject it. Zarifian here refers to the 1996 and 2004 resolutions, which are beyond the scope of this thesis timeline. Much more nuanced and analytical is the work by Walker, who identified the core of 1987 Armenian genocide resolutions and their impact on late Cold War diplomacy:

Turkey’s response was a veiled hint at pulling out of NATO—a modern version of the Ottoman tactic that, when all else failed, the sultan would remind the powers of the strategic importance of Turkey, and this would bring them to heel. It was also claimed that the resolution ‘encouraged terrorism’. This idea, that pro-Armenian (or pro-Kurdish) resolutions encourage terrorism, is one that needs to be looked at.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 221; Jennifer Dixon, “Changing the State’s Story: Continuity and Change in Official Narratives of Dark Pasts” (Ph.D. Diss., UC Berkeley, 2011), 84; Walker, *Armenia*, 382–83; Julien Zarifian, “The United States and the (Non-) Recognition of the Armenian Genocide,” *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines*, 1, (2013): 75–95; Julien Zarifian, “The Armenian-American Lobby and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy,” *Society* 51, no. 5 (2014): 503–12.

<sup>145</sup> Zarifian, “The United States”, 81.

<sup>146</sup> Walker, *Armenia*, 383.

As Walker noted above, Turkey pulling out of NATO, and the use of terrorism (ASALA) does indeed need to be looked at. Specifically, the core of chapter six is to uncover how the above was used by Israeli diplomats for leverage with Turkey and to block the subsequent American resolution in the United States Congress just two months after the European Parliament recognised the Armenian genocide.

Furthermore, in this context, a fundamental question in Cold War scholarship focuses on ‘how did the Cold War end?’ Some scholars have emphasised the role played by the Soviets, namely the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev’s (1985) administration and his reforms, leading to a process of liberalisation in Eastern Europe that ultimately ended the Cold War rivalry.<sup>147</sup> Others have explained the end of the Cold War through the economic decline of the Eastern European states and their increasing debts and the failings of communist command system.<sup>148</sup> Another group, however, have focused on the role played by the Americans under the Ronald Reagan administration which adopted an increasingly consistent and tough policy that placed such pressure on the ‘Evil Empire’ that it ultimately collapsed.<sup>149</sup> There is a school of ‘revisionists’ who argue that the manner in which the Americans and the Western Europeans prioritised the core values of the Western bloc also played an important role in ending the Cold War.<sup>150</sup> Specifically, this school focuses on the important role played by the Western Europeans during the ‘Polish crisis’ and thereafter during the ‘second Cold War’, emphasising the Western Europeans’ ambition to maintain détente, which clashed with the US administration’s ambition to launch a ‘new’ Cold War. The Western Europeans

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<sup>147</sup> See for example Archie Brown, “Perestroika and the End of the Cold War,” *Cold War History* 7, no. 1 (2007): 1–17; William E. Odom, “The Sources of ‘New Thinking’ in Soviet Politics,” in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004), 114–32; Jacques Lévesque, “The Messianic Character of Gorbachev’s ‘New Thinking’: Why and What For?,” in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004), 133–48.

<sup>148</sup> Among others, Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, “Economic Constraints and the Turn towards Superpower Cooperation,” in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004), 69–98; Silvio Pons, “The Rise and Fall of Eurocommunism,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45–65.

<sup>149</sup> See Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); Beth Fischer, “US Foreign Policy under Reagan and Bush,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 267–88.

<sup>150</sup> See John Young, “Western Europe and the end of the Cold War, 1979–1989,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289–310; Lundestad, “The European Role,” 50–68.

emphasised the importance of human rights as a core value of the Western alliance, leading to clashes in respect to the security questions that the Americans preferred to emphasise.<sup>151</sup>

In relation to the latter school, chapter six shows the continuing development of these changing Western priorities in the case of the Armenian resolutions of 1987. The Armenian resolutions underline the Americans' and Western Europeans' changing views, as well as the role played by Israeli diplomats in shaping the former. The chapter demonstrates the degree to which the Western Europeans and the Americans used these resolutions for different purposes: the European Parliament as an attempt to 'qualify' Turkey's prospective membership to the EEC by acknowledging the Armenian genocide and thus furthering human rights reforms in Turkey. This resolution was indeed passed. The United States Congress, meanwhile, viewed the Armenian resolution mainly as a threat to American national security and to NATO influence in the Middle East, and the parallel bill in that forum accordingly failed to pass. Despite the different outcomes, one cannot ignore how these resolutions were interconnected.

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<sup>151</sup> For an excellent analysis see others see: Sjursen, *The United States, Western Europe*; and Cox, "Another Transatlantic Split?", 121–46.



# Chapter 2

## Methodology: Scope, Sources, Limitations and Conceptual Frameworks

### What is the ‘Diplomacy of Genocide’ ?

Genocide has been a contested term in international history and its particular usage for diplomatic leverage in the post-1945 world order. This thesis in many ways also builds upon the term ‘diplomacy of genocide’, as it has been developed by A. Dirk Moses in his recent research project. This perspective of Cold War diplomacy should be understood in the context of how and to what extent the nation states and transnational organisations, specifically in the Western countries, responded to genocide across the globe, especially in the former British and French colonies. It should be noted that much of the work in Moses’ project focuses on the problematic story of how Western European powers such as Britain and France, with their legacy of colonial violence in Africa and Asia, have reacted to war crimes in post-colonial areas.<sup>152</sup> Hence, the diplomacy of genocide during the Cold War is a highly relevant approach to contextualise my doctoral thesis within the field of Holocaust and genocide studies. As Uğur Ümit Üngör observes, the Cold War only intensified the problem of manipulative and opportunistic diplomacy by the US and the Soviet Union with respect to genocide.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See A. Dirk Moses, “The Diplomacy of Genocide,” in *The Oxford Handbook on History and International Relations* (forthcoming); Moses’s recent works, which study the international response to particular case studies such as Pakistani soldiers in Bangladesh, 1971–1974, or the British response to the Secession of East Pakistan in 1971: A. Dirk Moses, “The United Nations, Humanitarianism and Human Rights: War Crimes/Genocide Trials for Pakistani Soldiers in Bangladesh, 1971–1974,” in *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 258–80; A. Dirk Moses, “Civil War or Genocide? Britain and the Secession of East Pakistan in 1971,” in *Civil Wars in South Asia: State Sovereignty, Development*, eds. Aparna Sundar and Nandini Sundar (New Delhi, Sega Publications, 2011), 142–65; A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten, eds., *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (London: Routledge, 2018); specifically, see on the section of their book ‘A global event’, the chapter by Maxim Matusevich, “Strange Bedfellows: an Unlikely Alliance Between the Soviet Union and Nigeria During the Biafran War” and the chapter by Brian McNeil “‘And Starvation is the Grim Reaper’: the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive and the Genocide Question During the Nigerian Civil War, 1968–1970”.

<sup>153</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, “Studying Mass Violence: Pitfalls, Problems, and Promises,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 1 (2012): 75.

Perhaps one of the best available examples to demonstrate Üngör's point is the Cambodian genocide. The work of Ben Kiernan shows how genocide and Cold War diplomacy are intimately connected. To secure US influence in the North Pacific in the mid-1970s and to maintain a renewed geopolitical alliance with China, the Gerald Ford administration, especially Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, along with the US's regional ally, Thailand, chose to ignore the mass killings of the Khmer Rouge perpetrator regime.<sup>154</sup> In the well-documented meeting between Henry Kissinger and the Thai Foreign Minister, Chatichai Choonhavan, held in Washington DC on 26 November 1975, Kissinger asked Choonhavan: "How many people did he kill? Tens of thousands?" [...] Chatichai: "Not more than 10,000. That's why they need food." [...] A few minutes later in the meeting with Chatichai, Kissinger noted: "We are aware that the biggest threat to Southeast Asia at the present time is North Vietnam. Our strategy is to get the Chinese into Laos and Cambodia as a barrier to the Vietnamese." Chatichai responded: "I asked the Chinese to take over in Laos. They mentioned that they had a road-building team in northern Laos." Kissinger concluded: "We would support this. You should also tell the Cambodians that we will be friends with them. They are murderous thugs, but we won't let that stand in our way. We are prepared to improve relations with them. Tell them the latter part, but don't tell them what I said before".<sup>155</sup> Even though Kissinger knew about the mass killings of the Cambodians after April 1975 when the Khmer Rouge perpetrator regime came to power it did not bother him too much as long the US could expand its Cold War security belt in the North Pacific with new allies. The powerful quotations from this meeting introduced at the outset of Kiernan's chapter leave no doubt about the complete indifference of the American administration towards mass violence that escalated into genocide. In this case, therefore, we see how when faced with the demands of Cold War geopolitics and bipolar tension, questions of genocide and human rights could become matters of little or no concern.

This encourages us to ask how and why the *memory* of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust could be leveraged for Cold War geopolitics in the Middle East

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<sup>154</sup> Ben Kiernan, "Documentation Delayed, Justice Denied: The Historiography of the Cambodian Genocide", in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 468–86.

<sup>155</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, "Secretary's Meeting with Foreign Minister Chatichai of Thailand", 26 November 1975, declassified 27 July 2004, 19., 3–4, 8: ([nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB193/HAK-11-26-75.pdf](https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB193/HAK-11-26-75.pdf)). Cited in Kiernan, "Documentation Delayed", 68–9.

during the late 1970s.

This research project on the diplomacy of genocide in the Middle East seeks to explore these issues in the as yet understudied context of *memory* and great power politics in respect to state security during the later Cold War period in the Middle East. This thesis researches in particular the diplomacy of the Armenian genocide and global memory of the Holocaust, and the degree to which these two genocides were leveraged during the late 1970s and 1980s in a series of important diplomatic contexts in the Middle East, especially by Israel. In the empirical chapters four to eight this study adds a whole new layer of 'diplomacy of genocide' in light of late Cold War diplomacy and the Middle East security dilemma. The main contribution of this study to the notion of 'diplomacy of genocide' is that it addresses an important yet understudied question in memory studies: could diplomats and civil servants mobilise memory, specifically memory of genocide? This question has been addressed in the context of Chinese and Japanese interpretations of their war history between 1937 and 1945. The work of Yinan He, for example, illustrates how and why both Chinese and Japanese elite used and mobilised these contested memories of the war to legitimise their restored bilateral ties in the early 1980s.<sup>156</sup> Yinan He argues that "Elites may shelve their historiographical differences with another country for fear of damaging immediate economic and political interests but tend to exploit the political benefit of these differences when they feel a strong sense of insecurity in domestic politics."<sup>157</sup>

Yinan He's case study is different from that of Israeli-Turkish relations, however. In the complex matrix of the Middle East and the contested memories of the Armenian genocide, Israeli diplomats mobilised the memory of the Armenian genocide, in powerful ways as a response to significant concerns about damage to their immediate interests in the Middle East geopolitical order.

## **Empirical Sources**

### *Archival Material*

The Israeli historian Uri Bialer, who has studied Israeli diplomacy extensively, identifies a specific feature of Israeli culture found in diplomatic reports that is highly

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<sup>156</sup> Yinan He, "Remembering and Forgetting the War: Elite Mythmaking, Mass Reaction, and Sino-Japanese Relations, 1950–2006," *History & Memory* 19. No. 2, (2007): 43–74.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

relevant to my research project. Bialer notes that in the first two decades of Israel's existence (1948–1968), diplomatic reports were very selective and disorganised. Documents were written within the strict norms of confidentiality extant during the pre-state *Yishuv* period and later implemented in Israeli diplomatic and political culture.<sup>158</sup> Although Israeli diplomatic reporting has improved since then, it is often still very formal and at times too vague or too succinct.<sup>159</sup>

Bialer suggests that since diplomats of other nations were required to deliver information regarding their meetings with Israeli diplomats, or to evaluate Israel's position on a certain problem for their local MFA, he was able to interpolate missing information from documents in foreign archives written by foreign diplomats who described their meetings with Israeli diplomats.<sup>160</sup> Even though this solves this specific problem, it presents a new risk of its own: expanding the scope of a research project whose intent is to narrow in on one perspective (one national player, such as Israel), by adding new perspectives that could complicate the analysis (those of other players, Turkey or the US, for example). I am not convinced, however, that this is the best solution to the problem of the cryptic Israeli diplomatic correspondence.<sup>161</sup>

In this project, two types of primary sources are explored: first and foremost, the ISA documents from the period. During my visits in the ISA in Jerusalem, I have retrieved documents on Israeli-Turkish relations, Israeli-American relations and American Jewish organisations. As Bialer noted above, by themselves, these documents do not always build a clear and coherent historical narrative. Furthermore, due to the martinet censorship regulations of the Israeli archives, documents become declassified only after 25 – 30 years, and some of these documents remain classified for longer periods. The IISO archive, meanwhile, some of whose actions are likely to be relevant to chapters three to six, is sealed for 70 years.

For the most part, I overcome this challenge by supplementing documentary evidence with oral interviews with veteran Israeli diplomats and IISO officials who were in active service during the 1970s and 1980s, some of whom actually signed the

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<sup>158</sup> See Uri Bialer, "Archival Documents in the Basement in Historical Perspective – A Personal Note," in *New Perspectives on the History of International Relations*, ed. Gadi Heimann (Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations Press, 2012), 92–103; for a similar assessment see also Gershon Revlin and Aliza Revlin, *Zar Lo Yavin* (Tel Aviv: Israeli Ministry of Defiance, 1988) [Hebrew].

<sup>159</sup> Bialer, "Archival Documents".

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

documents themselves, or were mentioned in them. These veterans did not always agree to meet me and to speak openly about this challenging topic, but when they did agree to talk, they provided some unexpected answers that did not just add texture to the written record but sometimes uncovered other issues that could not be found in the archival records.

In some individual cases in the thesis, however, there is a difficulty in employing oral histories, especially in correspondence between American and Israeli/Turkish officials. The main reason I could not use the oral history method here is that some of these officials passed away years ago or are still alive but inaccessible. I approach this challenge by relying on secondary literature and biographies that could help to give more substance and context about these individuals and how they are connected to the topic under consideration. For example, the increasing body of research on the impact of Turkish Prime Minister, Turgut Özal on Turkish foreign policy and on General Alexander Haig will be employed in chapters three and four in the context of Israeli-Turkish relations.

### *Elite Oral History*

This approach is exemplified by the Miller Centre's Presidential Oral History Program, which has been producing roughly seven hundred interviews, spanning the Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush and Bill Clinton presidencies.<sup>162</sup> These presidential oral history projects uncover the 'elite environment' of the White House.<sup>163</sup> Russell L. Riley, who launched the Clinton administration project including 134 oral interviews with key officers in the staff, key members of the Congress and US Secretaries of State, Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright and others. As proposed by Riley, at the heart of this 'elite approach' stands the understanding "that these interviews [with the elite] also provide an opportunity for scholars to probe into areas for which there would normally be little written record under the best of circumstances".<sup>164</sup> In other words, the elite oral histories provide historians the opportunity to interview professionals working in elite environments. This approach

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<sup>162</sup> See [www.millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories](http://www.millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories) (accessed 12 February 2019).

<sup>163</sup> Russell L. Riley, "Presidential Oral History: The Clinton Presidential History Project," *Oral History Review* 34, no. 2 (2007): 81–106.

<sup>164</sup> Russell L. Riley, *Inside the Clinton White House: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press 2016), X.

differs from the public oral history approach. As noted by oral historian Graham Smith, public oral history or ‘the history from below’ underlines the experience of neglected voices of sections in the public such as women, ethnic minorities, or lesbian and gay communities.<sup>165</sup>

The concept of presidential oral history should be tailored to the study of Israeli foreign policy employed in this project. I suggest three approaches to the use of critical oral history and Israel’s foreign policy: in the first approach oral histories are employed as a standalone method, recognising that a considerable proportion of the records kept by the Israeli diplomatic/intelligence institutions have been classified, thereby keeping a substantial number of critical aspects of Israel’s diplomacy hidden. In the second approach, oral histories are employed as an additional empirical source to supplement formal records where these constitute the main source of inquiry. Oral histories, here, offer a different perspective on, or more nuanced insights into, Israeli foreign policy as a bottom-up method that imbues a sense of humanity to historical scholarship.<sup>166</sup>

These are the two poles, however. A third approach—which is also the more common one with respect to Israel’s foreign policy—represents a grey area between these poles. Specifically, there are some broad-scale histories of Israel’s foreign policy that are fragmented in terms of their access to archival records, since successive Israeli state censors have decided to partly declassified records in the ISA on a specific theme, but to leave other aspects or consecutive periods of the same topic classified. For example, Israel’s foreign policy in respect to the great powers, especially the Americans during the Cold War. Given that some aspects and periods of this massive topic are open for research, others will remain classified for at least a few more decades. Oral history has the potential to be a methodological solution to cover the grey areas within these broad histories. Thus, in this thesis in particular, I will make use of third approach.<sup>167</sup>

It is important to note that personal bias is a significant pitfall when working with oral testimonies. A narrator might be telling only some of the truth because of many reasons such as censorship regulations or the political sensitivity of the topic in question. Also, the narrator's opinion and experience are subjective. To confront these

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<sup>165</sup> Graham Smith, “The Making of Oral History: Sections 1–2”, *The Institute of Historical Research* (2008), accessed 12 February 2019.

<sup>166</sup> Eldad Ben Aharon, “Doing Oral History with the Israeli Elite and the Question of Methodology in International Relations Research,” *Oral History Review* (forthcoming, 2020).

<sup>167</sup> Ben Aharon, “Doing Oral History,” 2–3.

issues, when using oral sources I rely not only on one or two interviewees but 19 Israeli diplomats and former elite intelligence members, four American officials and two Turkish diplomats. Each of them comes from a different background and rank, and each has followed a different professional path and served in various countries. The variety of voices and the high diversity limits the risk that two or three former diplomats might not be completely honest about their actions. Most importantly, none of the oral testimonies stands alone: they have been placed carefully against MFA archival materials to add texture and depth to the analysis. In the subsequent section I will address ethical issues and the challenges of interviewing these former diplomats to my project.

In this respect, is there an oral history tradition among the histories of Israeli foreign policy? There is one, but it lacks a systematic tradition in terms of capturing all the oral history accounts of Israeli diplomats into one archive, instead comprising of the work of individual researchers. A handful of historians, such as Yitzhak Mualem, Ofra Bengio, Avi Shlaim and Avi Raz, have conducted oral interviews with Israel diplomats and some Defence Ministry officials and implemented these in their works.<sup>168</sup> Others, such as Rotem Giladi, for example, based their empirical work on memories of Israeli diplomats.<sup>169</sup> It is quite clear, however, that, currently, there is still unbroken ground with respect to the oral history of Israel's diplomacy, and this research seeks to make an important contribution to this developing literature. The literature on oral history interviews, meanwhile, is quite extensive. Some useful textbooks written by Paul Thompson, Valerie Raleigh Yow, Lynn Abrams Donald A. Ritchie and others, have guided historians and social scientists as to how to conduct successful oral history projects.<sup>170</sup> Specifically, these guides give theoretical and practical guidance to

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<sup>168</sup> See for instance Mualem, "Israel's Foreign Policy,"; Bengio, *The Turkish-Israeli Relationship*; Avi Raz, "The Generous Peace Offer that was Never Offered: The Israeli Cabinet Resolution of June 19, 1967," *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 1 (2013): 85–108; Avi Shlaim, "Interview with Abba Eban, 11 March 1976," *Israel Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 153–77

<sup>169</sup> See for instance the following memories of Israeli diplomats: Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes* (London: Jonathan Cape Press, 1993); Walter Eytan, *The First Ten Years: Diplomatic History of Israel* (New York: Simon and Schuster Press, 1958); Moshe Sharett, *At the Threshold of Statehood: 1946–1949* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Press, 1958), [in Hebrew]; See also Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>170</sup> See for instance the useful guides by Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past Oral History*, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2005); Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge publications, 2010); Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Donald A. Ritchie ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

academics about how to plan their oral history projects, to assess their data, and to build oral history collections. Last, but not least, some of these books also give a thorough survey of how to maintain the highest standards of interviews and to avoid ethical issues.

*Conducting the Oral Interviews: Protocol, Copyright and Ethical Boundaries*

The oral historian Paul Thompson noted once that “copyrights can only be transferred in writing. However, short extracts may be used for reviews or research, including theses. Perhaps more importantly, a licence to quote the informant is implied by a consent to be interviewed”.<sup>171</sup> Thompson thus problematises the tension between following the ethical guidelines of oral history and the practical insights and guidelines on how to use interviews for academic writing even without a formal written statement by the narrators. As in some other countries, the Israeli copyright law (2007) determines that any intellectual property (in this case an oral interview) is the property of the interviewer, i.e. the creator of the interview, or alternatively the institution the interviewer works for.<sup>172</sup>

Thus, when we are discussing the ethics of conducting oral history interviews, there are several approaches. One of them is the shared authority or sharing authority, approach. This is represented by Michael Frisch (1990), who suggests that although in some countries the interview is the property of the interviewer by law, the oral interview should be considered as the joint intellectual property of both interviewer and narrator. More specifically, Frisch emphasises the shared decision-making process with respect to the interview after it has been conducted; i.e. the actual product. This approach, therefore, implies a more dynamic and inclusive process in respect to the methodology, ethics and politics of oral history among Social Science and Humanities research, and this has recently been explored further in the works of Steven High, Lisa Ndejuru, and Kristen O’Hare and Erin Jessee.<sup>173</sup> Steven High defines the inclusive dual relations

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<sup>171</sup> Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 125.

<sup>172</sup> The Copyrights Law (2007) was legislated in the Knesset on 19 November 2007, see: [www.tau.ac.il/law/members/birnhack/IsraeliCopyrightAct2007.pdf](http://www.tau.ac.il/law/members/birnhack/IsraeliCopyrightAct2007.pdf) [in Hebrew] (accessed on 2 May 2017).

<sup>173</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University New York Press, 1990); Steven High, Lisa Ndejuru, and Kristen O’Hare, eds., “Special Issues on Sharing Authority: Community-University Collaboration in Oral History, Digital Storytelling, and Engaged Scholarship,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no.1 (2009): 5–11.



between a narrator and the interviewer, saying “it requires the cultivation of trust, the development of collaborative relationships, and shared decision-making”.<sup>174</sup> Trust is indeed an extremely important and, in many instances, quite elusive factor to be established with respect to oral interviews, especially with former officials of state authorities, and in highly charged political settings.

Further along these lines, Erin Jessee conducted interviews with ex-combatants and perpetrators of genocide and related mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In this context, Jessee discusses some of the implications of the shared authority approach with respect to highly politicised research topics. She argues, rightly, that the sharing authority approach does not necessarily solve all the power imbalances in the relationship between the historian/researcher and his narrators.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, Jessee outlined that anthropologists, such as Charles Briggs, have been dealing with this question of power imbalance between the interviewer and narrator for quite a while now, and have determined that the researcher still has the advantage over the narrator even with the sharing authority approach.<sup>176</sup> Thus, Jessee raises an important methodological question about highly politicised topics; she asks whether sharing authority in these research settings is possible or indeed desirable? Jessee identifies that sharing authority in the context of her research is highly problematic, mainly, as Jessee puts this, due to the ‘typically disadvantaged positions’ of her narrators in Rwanda and Bosnia. Hence, Jessee argues that her narrators sought to promote their own political agendas through her research outputs.<sup>177</sup>

With respect to my research project, which also discusses a highly charged political setting, there is the potential that I might face a similar problem; i.e. my narrators might try to justify a certain perspective of their actions as Israeli diplomats with respect to the diplomacy of Armenian genocide, and to use my research to manipulate the presentation of the actions taken by the MFA in this regard. Since most of my questions have been drawn from studying original ISA documents, however, and since I am not relying exclusively on the diplomats’ accounts, my research narrative is

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<sup>174</sup> Steven High, “Sharing Authority: An Introduction Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études Canadiennes,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 12–34, (especially 13)

<sup>175</sup> Erin Jessee, “The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings,” *The Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 287–307, (especially 303).

<sup>176</sup> See for instance, Charles L. Briggs, “The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the ‘Invention of Tradition’,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 4 (1996): 435–69.

<sup>177</sup> Jessee “The Limits of Oral History,” 289. For more on this see also the short discussion: Federico Lorenz “How Does One Win a Lost War? Oral History and Political Memories,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124–44.

quite robust, with the interview data used merely to complement the dominant primary sources.

In relation to the power imbalance in the relationship between myself and my narrators, it is obvious that, theoretically and practically speaking, after having the narrators on tape and later the page, I hold great power to use these interviews in my writings, presentation, etc. Ethically speaking, I am aware of this risk and will use the interviews in my writing selectively, i.e. with relevance to the topic discussed, and sparingly. In practice, however, this oral history interview project needs to address a few constructed limitations regarding retaining copyrights and sharing authority with my narrators. First, my narrators are all former diplomats who, although they have freely spoken with me and shared their professional experience and knowledge, frequently feel uncomfortable in speaking about certain aspects of the themes or answering some specific questions, due to the sensitivity and highly politicised nature of the topic.

With respect to applying other ethical issues arising in highly politicised research settings, Jesse maintains that “that there are limits to the application of oral history, particularly when working amid highly politicized research settings”.<sup>178</sup> As discussed above, my research setting quite obviously should also be considered to be highly politicised. Since most of my interviewees are former Israeli diplomats and IISO officials, they are usually highly discreet and, sometimes, even suspicious, due to the sensitivity of my topic, and their professional background. I therefore chose to ask for their permission at the beginning of the interview to record our conversation. I also explained that the recordings and the transcriptions will be used only for my academic writings and not for anything outside of that. Furthermore, in some cases, my interviewees asked me to send them the transcribed interview before I could use it in my writings. Of course, I agreed to their requests. Throughout the process of contacting them, interviewing and later transcribing the interview, I make sure that they retained the highest trust in my professional and ethical standards as an interviewer. First, it is important to me personally as an academic who aims to write meticulous academic work to maintain the highest oral interview standards and ethics. Secondly, in some

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 287. For more on oral history and political memories in highly charged political settings see also the short discussion: Lorenz, “How Does One Win a Lost War?,” (especially 126); and Sean Field, “Disappointed Remains: Trauma, Testimony, and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142–63.

cases, one interview was not sufficient to cover other themes in this project. Hence, I met with some of these veterans two or three times, and establishing their trust in myself and the project was thus extremely important.

In summary, although the highly politicised and sensitive topic and setting of the interviews made it quite difficult to ask my narrators to sign a formal copyright agreement as required by the ethical standards, I do seriously acknowledge the high standards and the ethical guidelines required of such a project, specifically the oral history regulations of UK universities and the Oral History Association (hereafter OHA).<sup>179</sup> Thus, I carefully designed a copyright sheet, (appendix 1), which addresses the two possible ethical and legal issues discussed above. The sheet outlines the project's aim, and the scope is broadly defined, along with the intention to use the interview in only academic settings. The sheet also gives the narrators a contact address if they wish to talk to a formal authority at Royal Holloway University of London, such as the ethical committee. Most of the narrators have agreed to sign the sheet. A small number of narrators refused to sign the copyright sheet because they did not think it necessary after they have agreed to be interviewed and recorded. Also, it should be noted that all the interviews were undertaken during my five field trips to Israel, and one trip each to the US and Turkey. All the interviews, therefore, were conducted face-to-face in the office or homes of the narrators. Two interviews, however, were conducted via Skype (that is outlined in the footnotes where applicable) when interviewees had to cancel face-to-face meetings due to their busy schedules but nonetheless agreed to conduct the interviews online.

All in all, it is clear to me that this study has some significant methodological limitations as mentioned above. By being clear from the start that the literature on the Armenian genocide and Holocaust and genocide studies is often highly politicised, it is possible to approach the empirical sources, specifically the oral sources, from as detached a perspective as possible. That being said, an element of subjectivity does not necessarily impair the analysis. As noted in the previous chapter, the core argument of the thesis does not see Israel's policy on the Armenian genocide as a zero-sum framework. Not just Cold War fears and collective security at the expense of human rights values but also it is recognised that there is a grey area between these core values

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<sup>179</sup> See [www.oralhistory.org](http://www.oralhistory.org) (accessed 17 February 2019).

in which some subject judgement could be helpful when appraising the empirical sources.

### *Thesis Timeframe*

With respect to the scope of the research, as I mentioned earlier, Auran's work encompasses Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide from 1948 until early 2000.<sup>180</sup> A closer examination of Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide needs to be narrowed to a shorter, more specific period, or in other words a 'seminal period'. The period under discussion in this thesis not only allows the close examination of Israeli-Turkish relations and the changing alliances in the Middle East during key moments of the Cold War but also of how the emerging memories among the Armenians themselves informed geopolitics in the Middle East. The fact that, after a few decades of silence, the Armenian diaspora started to remind the world about the forgotten 1915 genocide, makes the 'Armenian question' an important matter in international relations and provides the starting point of the investigation. In the post-Cold War period adding local Israeli actors changes and complicates the research setting, making it more complex. This development changes the scope of the investigation and warrants a different perspective which focuses more on the relations between the domestic political arena and foreign policy.<sup>181</sup>

Furthermore, there are two core explanations for the scope of inquiry in this thesis: firstly, the research questions that this thesis formulates focus on the initial emergence of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide into the international fora, hence the decision to start from the mid-late 1970s. Before that period, the Armenian diaspora's suppressed past had not emerged into international relations. Hence, prior to the narrative boom, neither Turkey nor its allies, such as Israel, had to address any claims of genocide against the Armenians and this therefore represents the departure point of the thesis. That said, since the thesis addresses Israeli-Turkish relations in the context of the Cold War, I have stepped a bit back in time to begin the thesis in 1978, so as to describe the deteriorating relations between Ankara and Jerusalem (1978–1980) that drove the latter to leverage the Armenian genocide so as to

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<sup>180</sup> Auran, *The Banality of Denial*.

<sup>181</sup> For more on this see discussion and the periodisation of this research project see: Eldad Ben Aharon, "Between Ankara and Jerusalem: the Armenian Genocide as a Zero-Sum Game in Israel's Foreign Policy (1980's -2010's)," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 20, no. 5 (2018): 459–76.

gain diplomatic profit during the crisis years (1980–1985). Second, this period forms the core of this thesis because it is only this period for which some declassified archival records are available at the time of conducting the research and writing the thesis. Thus, this thesis timeline is limited to 1988 since this is the final year to which ISA documents have thus far been declassified. It is the combination of these two factors that explains my choice to limit the investigation to the last decade of the Cold War. One more factor should limit the thesis timeline to 1988.

The developments in the second period lead into the third period (2001–2016), when several new factors such as Israel’s policy against the Palestinians in Gaza, the Mavi Marmara controversy (2010), and the establishment of a new alliance between Israel and Azerbaijan each influenced Israel’s policy on the Armenian genocide.<sup>182</sup> Each of these two later periods in their own ways led to further domestic political pressure on the Israeli parliament to recognise the Armenian genocide, although these resolutions were not in fact successful. Most importantly, they require a different approach to studying the Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide and therefore are beyond the scope of this thesis.

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<sup>182</sup> ‘*Mavi Marmara*’ was a Turkish vessel that was boarded by the IDF in 2010. In the subsequent violent confrontation nine Turkish activists were killed. See for example: İlker Aytürk, “The Coming of an Ice Age? Turkish–Israeli Relations Since 2002,” *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 675–87; Ben Aharon, “Between Ankara and Jerusalem,” 459–76.

**PART II:**  
**THE ‘ARMENIAN GENOCIDE DECADE’ IN ISRAELI-  
TURKISH RELATIONS**

# Chapter 3

## **From Deterioration to Suspension: (1978–1982)**

### **Introduction**

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 ended the long-lasting alliance between Iran and Israel and led to a fundamental restructuring of relationships around the Middle East. In this context, I argue in this chapter that, between 1979 and 1980, the Israeli MFA made strenuous efforts to bolster the close Cold War security alliance between Israel, Turkey and the Americans, seeking to maintain Turkey as a close ally. Furthermore, Turkey's energy crisis and social-political chaos, with the attendant possibility of a fundamentalist revolution, put additional pressure on Israel to secure the delicate geopolitical balance in the region. The Israeli diplomats therefore exploited the Cold War fears of the Americans and the Turkish military generals as a diplomatic tool to influence Turkey and to normalise relations.

Specifically, this chapter examines the historical circumstances that undermined Israeli-Turkish relations between 1978 and 1983. This chronological review provides the foundation for the detailed analysis in the subsequent chapters of Israel's attitude to the memory of the 1915 genocide, and how this intersected with the needs and trends in its relationship with Turkey. Under these circumstances of changing alliances and new realities in the Middle East, the growing campaigns in relation to the Armenian genocide encompassing academic pressure, commemorative events, political expressions in the form of parliamentary resolutions, and even terrorism, represented both a complex challenge, but also an opportunity, for those seeking to manage Israel's vital relationship with Turkey. Following this structure, readers will be able both to attain a more complete overview of the region and the historical events that drove Israeli foreign policy, and more easily to identify the causal links between these regional affairs, great power politics and how they serve as means to leverage the contested memories of the Armenian genocide.

Essentially, therefore, the late Cold War dynamics in the Middle East form an ever-present backdrop to the relationship between Turkey and Israel. Lundestad's compelling analysis of US power in his seminal paper, 'Empire by Invitation?', could be usefully applied to describe the Israeli diplomatic engagement with Turkey, where

the US diplomats in the region were ‘invited’ to become more involved in helping the Israelis court Turkey. The chapter showcases that the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War could be a two-way street. In other words, while in the mainstream historiographical debate on this period in the Middle Eastern context, the Cold War dynamics are generally characterised by the image of the Americans and Soviets chewing either end of ‘the bone’ that represents the regional resources and thus alliances with the surrounding countries, Lundestad’s analysis has deepened this understanding, demonstrating that the relationship is not one-way regarding Western and Eastern Europe and the superpowers. Building on Lundestad’s analysis, one can show how regional powers such as Israel could influence the Americans in order to pursue their self-serving local and diplomatic goals.

I develop the argument in three main parts: the first part (1978–1980) reviews the pragmatic and ideological reasons for the crisis in relations between Israel and Turkey, along with empirical evidence of the diplomatic efforts made by Israel to prevent the suspension of relations by Turkey. After the fundamentalist coup in Iran in March 1979, and Turkey’s continuing domestic crisis, the negative momentum stopped with Turkey’s military coup of 12 September 1980. To maintain the delicate balance between the fundamentalist camp and the secular camp, however, this coup did not change Turkey’s decision to freeze relations with Israel between 1980–1983. Given the suspension of relations by Turkey, the second part (1981–1983) examines mutual efforts by Turkey and Israel to use Jewish American organisations to conduct informal diplomatic engagements around the Armenian issue. The third part (1983–1988), examines the circumstances that allowed an improvement in relations, mainly driven by reforms undertaken by Turkish Prime Minister, Turgut Özal’s (1983–1989) administration, including Turkey’s first application to join the EEC.

### **Turkey: Social, Political and Economic Breakdown (1978–1979)**

In early 1978, Turkey was facing serious energy problems, which led to social, political and economic chaos.<sup>1</sup> As George E. Gruen, Alon Liel, Raphael Israeli, Ofra Bengio and Amikam Nachmani all note, this domestic crisis led Turkey’s government to re-

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<sup>1</sup> Gruen, “Turkey’s Relations with Israel,”; Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East*, 47, 190; Gilad, “Our Neighbours,” 371–77; Israeli, “The Land of Many Crossroads,” 65–79; Nachmani, *Turkey Facing a New Millennium*.



evaluate its pro-Western foreign policy, and to adopt a pro-Muslim, pro-Arab orientation, which in turn suggested a somewhat more neutral position in respect to Cold War-related issues. This foreign policy shift was aimed at demonstrating to the Muslim and Arab world that the Arab energy suppliers could count on Turkey's vote in respect to Pan-Arab and Pan-Muslim concerns such as the status of Eastern Jerusalem and the Palestinian question. As the scholarship notes, this was done in order to satisfy two pressure groups: firstly, the leaders of the Arab countries who wanted to see Turkey aligning with the Arab world as part of its conflict with Israel. Secondly, to satisfy the domestic pressure being exerted by the Islamist forces within Turkey, especially by ultra-Islamist Necmettin Erbakan, who was a major political player at this time, and part of successive coalitions during the second half of the 1970s.

In this context, the Israeli diplomats in Jerusalem, Ankara and Istanbul, followed the crisis in Turkey with anxiety. The following document from the Israeli deputy ambassador in Ankara (1976–1978), David Ariel, evaluates the status of Israeli-Turkish relations in light of Turkey's economic problems. Ariel notes: "Bülent Ecevit's government is reassessing Turkey's foreign policy orientation. Ecevit's new 'national security doctrine' differentiates between Turkey's commitment to NATO and Turkey's other foreign policy interests".<sup>2</sup> Ariel went on to note "Turkey's latest disappointments regarding promises by the US for economic aid that are not being fulfilled, supplemented by Turkey feeling disappointed about Western European countries that disengage from Turkey's initiative to promote economic cooperation between Turkey and Europe".<sup>3</sup> Ariel therefore concludes:

The outcome of all that, excluding Turkey's commitment to NATO, is that the Turks hold a clear vision of an independent foreign policy with regards to the issues concerning the Middle East, the Muslim world, Africa and Cyprus. This independent approach includes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Turkey has no objections to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state; this affects Turkey's attitude to Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey's new 'national security doctrine', may have indirectly made the weakening of

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<sup>2</sup> Embassy in Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Ecevit's Government Foreign Policy Orientation, 6 July 1978, ISA/MFA/000RWG7,1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 5, 7.

ties with Israel easier since although Israel was an integral part of the Western bloc, it was not a member of NATO and, as a Middle Eastern country, would clearly be affected by any more independent Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East.

By early 1979 the situation became more problematic for the Turks; the emerging economic crisis of 1978 had now worsened, and thus Turkey applied its new foreign policy orientation to move towards the Muslim and Arab world and to undertake more substantial measures against Israel.

### **The Geopolitical Context:**

#### *The Iranian Revolution (December 1978–March 1979)*

In tandem with the events in Turkey, Iran was facing a serious economic and political crisis. During March 1979, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was removed after 28 years in power. His authoritative administration was highly pro-Western, with an especially close alliance with the US, but at the same time, the regime was noted for its violations of human rights, violence against civilians, and the personality cult of Pahlavi.<sup>5</sup> Apart from a short period in 1977 under President Carter's administration, both Israel and the US focused on the security interests and economic gains of this alliance, mostly overlooking the crimes of the Shah's oppressive regime. Given their shared Western bloc alignment, almost from the early 1950s, Israel had been a critical ally of the Shah's regime. This was part of the first Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion's vision of what became known as Israel's periphery policy, through which he sought to ally with the non-Arab Muslim countries in the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Overall, therefore, Turkey, Iran and Israel were the lynchpins of Western, and especially US, interests and security policies in the Middle East from the early stages of the Cold War to the late 1970s.

From 1976, however, the Shah's regime had suffered from terrorist attacks by rebel citizens. What provoked these terrorist attacks was the financial insecurity, social inequality and political chaos afflicting the Iranian people. In this unsettled context, from late 1978, the Middle Eastern Director of the Israeli MFA, Yeal Vered, began sending dramatic telegrams regarding the crumbling Israeli-Iranian relations and the

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<sup>5</sup> For a compelling analysis of the period leading to Khomeini's coup see: Saikal, "Islamism, the Iranian Revolution," 112–34.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Schonmann, *Israel's Phantom Pact*, 1.

possibility of a fundamentalist revolution:

Although we have not yet noticed a substantial deterioration of the economic ties between us and the Iranians, the chances are high given the fundamentalist extremes among the Iranian opposition. The most recent pronouncements by Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini, the fundamentalist leader, have become more and more antagonistic towards Israel. Specifically, Khomeini has been alleging that Israeli soldiers are helping the Shah to retain power, and thus killing the Iranian people. [...] Furthermore, there is Khomeini's notorious manifest to the Iranian people granting them the green light that Israelis arriving in Iran to replace the oil industry workers who are striking should be killed. Our sources are also reporting that Khomeini has been receiving substantial support from the Soviets in the form of funds and strategic advice. [...] All in all, we should keep a very low profile at the moment, and cover up our relations with the current regime.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly, these negative developments, when combined with the deteriorating situation on the Turkish front, were assessed from the Israeli perspective as a looming disaster. The signs from Ankara and subsequently Teheran indicated that Israel might lose two Cold War regional allies in a very short period of time. Later, in the very week of Khomeini's revolution, in a secret but now declassified document, Vered provides an assessment of the consequences of the Iranian revolution for both Israel's influence in the region and Western influence more generally:

The coup d'état in Iran is not just another violent regime change effected by opposition groups, or the military. It is similar to the French and Russian revolutions; this revolution has been a result of a long and consistent separation and extreme polarisation between the Iranian elite, and the poor and average people that has been going on for a few decades. [...] the fundamentalist revolution led by Khomeini had been targeting among other things the Iranian Jews and Zionism, singling out Israel as an ally of Western imperialism and saying that the Palestinians should return to their historical land. Furthermore,

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<sup>7</sup> Yeal Vered, re: Iranian Israeli Relations, Jerusalem to Tehran et al. 19 December 1978, ISA/MFA/IT4000OQ4/268, 1–2.

the pressure on the Iranian Jewish community from Khomeini's cult has been suggesting that if the Jews would like to live peacefully in Iran, then they should from this point on reject Israel and Zionism and support the Palestinians' struggle.<sup>8</sup>

An oral account by Yehoyada Haim, Israel's ambassador to China (1995–2000) and, during the 1980s, the head of the MFA's Middle East department, further assesses the significance of the Iranian revolution to the region and thus to Israeli-Turkish relations.

We have lost Iran, which was very important to our periphery foreign policy doctrine, and simultaneously it seems that the same processes were happening with another important ally and regional Muslim power, Turkey. The Israeli-Egyptian peace accord was only just signed so we could not call them true allies, and the Arab world was calling to boycott us; we were completely isolated in the region.<sup>9</sup>

Supplemented with the other MFA documents, Haim's oral account provides us more with which to flesh out the impression the MFA elite had of Israel's place in the region in 1979: a feeling of almost complete isolation. All these sources help to establish the value of Israeli-Turkish relations in 1979, reinforcing Turkey's position as a vital strategic ally for Israel, just at the moment when a combination of economic and political crises were dominating Israeli foreign policy in the region. Although the Iranian revolution, and Israeli-Iranian relations are not the main focus of this chapter, they provide a necessary context to the discussion of Israeli-Turkish relations during this period. Specifically, a focus on Iran highlights how, from the perspective of the officials of the MFA's Middle Eastern department in March 1979, the fall of the Shah made arresting the deterioration in Israeli-Turkish relations an even bigger priority. These uncertain geopolitical conditions highlighted the need for Israeli diplomatic leverage with respect to Turkey, and it is argued that the contested memories of the Armenian genocide could provide this. The above account also offers a useful background to the fourth chapter, in that they demonstrate the need to secure the lives of the Iranian Jews who by the early 1980s were fleeing from Iran.

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<sup>8</sup> Yeal Vered, re: the Iranian Revolution, 7 March 1979, ISA/MFA/IT4000OQ4, 1; Yeal Vered, re: The Fundamentals of the Iranian Revolution, 5 March 1979, ISA/MFA/IT4000OQ4, 1–16,

<sup>9</sup> Oral interview with Yehoyada Haim, 28 January 2018, Jerusalem, Israel.

Before returning to the impending crisis with Turkey, however, it is critical also to contextualise the developments in Iran and Turkey within the wider changes in the Middle East region in the late Cold War period. In particular, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which started on 24 December 1979, although not as dramatic a challenge to Israel's security position in the Middle East as the Iranian revolution, was nonetheless still a very important development in the wider regional balance of the Cold War rivalry in south-central Asia. The changing realities of the East-West rivalry in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the second period of the Cold War became intertwined also with the Polish crisis from December 1981. These events influenced how Israel's diplomats sought to use that renewed East-West tension in the context of the potential for accessing US help in gaining a rapprochement with Turkey. Israel, therefore, become ever more isolated in a geographical region where it was increasingly beset by overtly hostile forces (whether Arab, fundamentalist or Soviet-backed) and with an ever-diminishing band of allies.

### **Preparations for a Military Coup? Terrorism and Political Chaos in Turkey (February 1980)**

Meanwhile, in Turkey, the political, economic and social state continued to deteriorate, as evident in the ongoing reports from Israeli diplomats in Ankara. The Israeli consul, Shimon Amir, wrote the following to Aria Levin, Israeli director of the MFA's Middle East department in Jerusalem:

In the streets of Istanbul, the tension has been rising, with the public opinion being that there is no alternative to a military coup, even though the Turkish military does not wish to pursue this. However, the Turkish generals are also aware that the Western bloc, specifically the Americans, will make their peace with this coup, aiming to save Turkey from a complete breakdown. That said, two questions are still concerning the generals: firstly, would they [military] know how to deal with the economic crisis? And second, to what extent would the low-ranking generals maintain loyalty to the military during the coup period? <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: Turkey's Domestic Problems, 20 February 1980, ISA/MFA/00035KI/132, 2.

The evaluation above seems sound but does not focus on the Israeli position regarding the Israeli-Turkish relations in a post-coup period. One might think that the Israelis, like the Americans, would support a military takeover, because it represented perhaps the last opportunity to save the crumbling relations with the Turks, and also to save Turkey's Kemalist heritage, which the Israelis and the Americans so greatly supported. As Amir suggested, however, the military indeed did not know how to cure the deep financial crisis. This meant that, in the long run, the heavy reliance on the Arab world as energy suppliers would continue. Ultimately, therefore, it might be supposed that, even in the event of a military coup, the Arab countries would continue to be able to pressurise Ankara to boycott relations with Jerusalem, and the military would not in fact be able to change the direction of relations between Israel and Turkey.

Amir also adds in his report that one of the core aspects of positive public opinion regarding the possibility of the Turkish military taking over was the emerging problem of terrorism:

The increased anarchy represented in the emerging terrorism in the streets automatically puts the responsibility on the Turkish military to take over the country. The military generals have already alerted the Turkish president via a signed petition that the civil administration has been too slow to deal with the problems of anarchy and terrorism. This petition has been reported by the media to the public and has thus already put pressure on the civilian government to enact laws that could potentially deal with the emerging terrorism. But, it is all too slow and too late. Six weeks after the petition, no state law against domestic terrorism has been put forward by the government.<sup>11</sup>

This important quotation uncovers the degree to which Turkey's extensive economic and political crisis had encouraged riots and general civil disorder by groups who sought to use the uncertainty to gain political power from the Turkish public. This also highlights the broader context of terrorism in Turkey during those years, which is important for this thesis, as will be discussed further in the next chapter.

A few days later, the Israeli ambassador in Ankara, Shimon Amir, sent a telegram to Jerusalem in which he outlined a conversation he had held with the British

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 3.

ambassador in Ankara. In this conversation, the British ambassador revealed the content of his meeting with the Turkish Chief of the General Staff (1980–1989), Kenan Evren, regarding the possibility of a military takeover. Most importantly, the conversation between Amir and the British ambassador gave the MFA access to Evren's views on Turkey's domestic problems:

Evren blamed the Turkish far left as the main factor driving the current social anarchy. With respect to foreign policy, Evren was extremely concerned about the fundamentalist coup in Iran, especially the possibility of Iran becoming communist hence part of the Soviet Bloc. This development could in due course turn to a national security threat to Turkey because it changes the geopolitical balance in the region.<sup>12</sup>

The conversation between Evren and the British ambassador, provides further insight, not just into the concerns among the Turkish military regarding anarchy and civil disorder, but also, the risk that the fundamentalist coup in Iran might become a national security threat for Turkey as the last Western bloc country in the region excluding Israel. Furthermore, this report helps to build a better understanding about the changing alliances in the Middle East in the context of the last Cold War period. This will be explored further in the subsequent chapters, especially in respect to how aspects of the Armenian issue, such as terrorism, were perceived as a possible key to keeping the Turks, the Israelis and the Americans close and united.

A related, and most important, development that adds to the big picture, was the signing of the Cooperation on Defence and Economy Agreement (hereafter, DECA) between Turkey and the US on 29 March 1980. This was a trade agreement, valid between March 1980 and December 1985, in which the US government committed to supply Turkey with defence equipment and military training in order to support Ankara to stabilise the deteriorating economy. The Americans inserted a condition in the treaty that the arms supplied could only be used for NATO-related missions.<sup>13</sup> The timing of the signing of the DECA is not surprising, however, as noted

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<sup>12</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Turkey's Chief of the General Staff of Turkey, 28 February 1980, ISA/MFA/00035KI/154.

<sup>13</sup> DECA - US Government and Turkey "Agreement for Cooperation on Defence and Econo," Treaties and other International Acts, Series 9901, Annex to Supplementary Agreement No. 2, (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 29 March 1980); see the full agreement here: [www.state.gov/libraries/turkey/461177/32t3111.pdf](http://www.state.gov/libraries/turkey/461177/32t3111.pdf) (accessed 15 February, 2019).

by Mahmut Bali Aykan the agreement was signed first and foremost as part of the Carter administration's response to the two crises of 1979: the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Aykan argues that the 1979 crises were viewed by both Ankara and Washington as a threat to the stability of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East which might have influenced the security of the oil supply to the West.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the renewed superpower tensions at this time, the emphasis on restoring Turkey's role in the region during early 1980, as evidenced by the DECA, comes across as a strategic move by the US, one that would also be much appreciated by Israel. Although there is no direct mention of the DECA in Israeli MFA records this is something that cannot be overlooked. Arguably the Israeli diplomats flagged this agreement as an important development; one that clarified American policy relating to the region, and Turkey, in 1980.

### **The Jerusalem Law (July 1980)**

In July 1980, the Knesset passed legislation known as the Jerusalem Law, stating that unified Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel, including the territories occupied during the 1967 Six-Day War.<sup>15</sup> As discussed in the earlier literature review, the recent work by Arye Naor reveals that the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin did not push for this law, as one might have imagined considering its political ideology. Rather, the official status of Jerusalem, including the occupied territories from the 1967 Six Day War, was dropped from the Camp David Conference in September 1978 in order to secure the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979.<sup>16</sup> After the Jerusalem Law was enacted, the Muslim and Arab world manifested an immediate, antagonistic and radical response to Israel's aspirations regarding Jerusalem, with one of their main targets being Israeli-Turkish bilateral relations. The governments of Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia applied explicit pressure on the then Turkish Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, to cut off all relations with Israel. Further, as Alon Liel explains in his work, December 1980 was the first time that Turkey caved in to this Arab pressure.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mahmut Bali Aykan, "Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post-Cold War Era: 1989–1995," *Middle East Journal* 50, no. 3 (1996): 344–58. (especially 345).

<sup>15</sup> See page 17 footnote 36.

<sup>16</sup> See Arye Naor, "Menachem Begin," 36–48.

<sup>17</sup> Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East*, 112–113.



More specifically, Liel points out that Saudi Arabia was in the best position to pressure Turkey in 1980 due to its agreement to lend the Turks \$250 million US dollars. Liel notes that the money was transferred to Turkey's National Bank by Saudi Arabia on 2 December 1980, the day Turkey officially declared its downgrading of relations with Israel.<sup>18</sup>

Reuven Merhav, who served for thirty years in IISO, *Ha-Shabak*, the Israeli General Security Service (hereafter IGSS) and the MFA (each for about ten years), argues in an oral interview that “from the Israeli perspective, the law was totally populist and irrelevant to the actual Israeli occupation in Eastern Jerusalem *de facto*. Furthermore, with respect to the ability of Muslims to access the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Jerusalem Law did not change the status quo that had existed in Jerusalem since 1967 Six Day War. The law, however, caused us meaningful problems in international fora”.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, in an oral interview, David Sultan who served as the Israeli ambassador in Ankara (2001 and 2003), and who was also born (1939) and raised in Cairo, provides a further evaluation of how the Jerusalem Law was viewed in the Muslim world during that period: “We [Israel] are still a relatively very small minority in the Middle East and this region still does not accept us being here. By contrast, we do anything possible to make the Middle East disapprove of us”.<sup>20</sup> Sultan criticises: “We should be more sensitive to these things, specifically to Muslim religious feelings. Why do we need to put two fingers in the eyes of the whole Muslim world? The Jerusalem Law is an example of stupidly shooting ourselves in the foot”.<sup>21</sup>

Both Sultan and Merhav take us back to 1980 and try to evaluate the actual estimate of how the Jerusalem Law affected decision making in the MFA. Placing Sultan's account side by side with Merhav's highlights somewhat different views of the same event. While one can argue that the real meaning of the 1980 Jerusalem Law was an irrelevance given the actual Israeli occupation in Eastern Jerusalem, I want to emphasise that although both Merhav and Sultan are fluent in Arabic, the latter proved to offer a deeper understanding of pan-Muslim aspirations regarding Jerusalem, and

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>19</sup> Oral interview with Reuven Merhav, 23 July 2017, Jerusalem, Israel. *Ha-Mossad le-Modiin ule-Tafkidim Meyuhadim* in Hebrew, literally translated from Hebrew as ‘The Institute’. *Shabak* is the Hebrew acronym for the General Security Service also known as *Sherut Bitachon Klali* or *Shin Bet*.

<sup>20</sup> Oral interview with David Sultan, 20 November 2016, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

how the Muslim street responded to Israel's disputed policies. Sultan's ability to go beyond the status quo that had existed in Jerusalem since the 1967 Six Day War suggests that the issue was not just the ability of Muslims to access the Al-Aqsa Mosque but perhaps more: as Sultan describes it, Israel being insensitive to Muslims' religious feelings. It was this, also, that was probably what provoked the anti-Israeli statements from the Turkish public and policymakers, who were also Muslims, regardless of the country's political drama and social and economic decline. This was indeed not just the worst development the Israeli diplomats in Turkey could have hoped for, but also serves to underline how, in the context of the Iranian revolution, the Jerusalem Law could possibly provoke and garner support for Turkey's fundamentalist faction. Indeed, the Law added Islamist fuel to Turkey's political and social crisis, bringing closer the prospect of another fundamentalist revolution. As with Israeli-Iranian relations, this would clearly represent the end of another major historical alliance in the Middle East.

In this regard, the recent work by Umut Uzer assesses the degree to which the 1980 Jerusalem Law provoked a huge demonstration by Turkey's Islamist parties, the National Salvation Party and the Welfare Party.<sup>22</sup> A few weeks after the Jerusalem Law was enacted, and six days before Turkey's 1980 military coup, on 6 September 1980, the 'liberation of Jerusalem demonstration' took place in the city of Konya, Turkey.<sup>23</sup> Konya was known as a centre of religious Muslims in Turkey, and the demonstration brought to the streets more than 20,000 people. Also, as Uzer uncovers in his account, it further stimulated the Turkish military to enact its planned takeover.

This should be connected to the previous sections in this chapter that assessed the impact of the Iranian Revolution, and how the Turkish military generals viewed the danger of a possible fundamentalist coup in Turkey driven by the Iranian Revolution. This is more than just a causal link, however; it should be highlighted how the Jerusalem Law was a double-edged sword: i.e. stimulating the Arab and Muslim world to boycott Israel, but simultaneously tipping the military towards the realisation that this was its last chance to save the Kemalist heritage before a fundamentalist coup. Although at first sight, therefore, the Jerusalem Law might seem like the cause of a final breakdown in Israeli-Turkish relations, paradoxically, it might actually have saved those relations in the long term because it stimulated the military to intervene in Turkey;

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<sup>22</sup> Uzer, "Turkey's Islamist Movement," 22–39.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

a step which was supported by the Americans and Israelis.

Given Turkey's economic, social and political chaos, it seems from the chronology of the events so far that there were only two possibilities in September 1980: a fundamentalist uprising or a military coup. These developments were followed closely by the Israeli diplomats who, as the next section shows, tried to build a grand strategy which could help them save whatever was left of Israeli-Turkish relations.

### **The Military Coup, A View from Jerusalem (12 September 1980)**

#### *NATO and the 'Armenian Question'*

On the day of Turkey's military coup a document sent by the Turkish MFA to the Israeli MFA in Jerusalem outlined the formal objectives and reasons for the military takeover. Although the geopolitical and domestic context has been explained previously in the chapter, the Turks provided the Israelis with a concrete and formal account outlining the state of affairs and Turkish foreign policy:

[...] the Turkish MFA has the honour to inform of the reasons, objectives and principles of the take-over by the Turkish Armed Forces on 12 September 1980 as declared by the National Security Council: 1. reasons: (a) The grave threat to internal peace. (b) The total paralysis of the democratic regime. (c) the prevailing situation which endangered the basic rights and freedom in the country.<sup>24</sup>

The formal points summarised Turkey's social, political and economic crisis as the causes for the military coup. Although the words 'terrorism' or 'fundamentalism' were not spelled here out loud, they were clearly implied in the phrases: "grave threat to internal peace" and "endangered the basic rights and freedom in the country". Furthermore, the document also cast light on the planned foreign policy principles and objectives of the incoming military regime:

[...] 4. Foreign Policy: (a) To maintain the basic policy aimed at contributing to world and regional peace in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. (b) to promote multilateral and bilateral relations with all nations. (c) To uphold our NATO commitments and actively maintain

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<sup>24</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, 12 September 1980, /ISA/MFA/0002Q841/404–45.

our ties with allies. (d) To preserve our approach regarding outstanding international issues. (e) To continue the efforts to resolve peacefully questions directly involving Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

Again, although the document does not refer directly to Israel, this part of the document states clearly what Turkey's new executive forces aimed to achieve. Since article (c) above reaffirmed Turkey's NATO commitments and maintaining continuity with allies, this potentially relates to Israel. Also, article (e) underlines the desire "to continue the efforts to resolve peacefully questions directly involving Turkey". The Armenian question falls of course into this category and indicates—at least implicitly—that the Turkish military officials acknowledged the degree to which the Western bloc countries had been concerned about Turkey's dark past and uncertain present. Generally, however, this text is mainly a general calming message to the leaders of Western countries, but definitely not acknowledging Turkey's responsibility in relation to any of the country's outstanding foreign policy questions (Armenian, Kurdish or Cypriot). Nevertheless, when the Israeli diplomats read this, after months of deterioration in Israeli-Turkish relations they, arguably, could have cause to relax. Two days later, the Israeli director of MFA Middle East department Aria Levene assessed the status of the countries' relations after 12 September 1980:

The Turkish military has hesitated for quite a long time to take over power. [...] The current problems seem, more than in previous military coups (1960, 1971) deeper and more fundamental ones. However, probably, the military felt the looming danger to the Republic as a secular and democratic entity. The military decision to take over was mainly driven by the demonstration in Konya which had fundamentalist characteristics which are forbidden by the laws of the Turkish Republic. [...] it seems that accordingly the military will respect its commitments to NATO and its bilateral ties with other countries. Therefore, given that Israel is viewed as integral part of the Western bloc, current relations with us will be kept in their current level. [...] strategically speaking, the new administration which is based on military executives has a more positive view about Israel, and I think we

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,2.

should not expect any change to the status of the *Olei Ma'avar* (transit immigrants).<sup>26</sup>

Levene's forecast seems quite realistic and grounded based on the developments to that point and the formal statement from the Turkish MFA above. Nevertheless, this forecast does not take other factors into account, such as Turkey's energy crisis which was driving further alignment with the Arab Muslim energy suppliers. Regardless of Turkey's commitments to NATO and the West, these other influences would also shape foreign policy and had the potential to prompt a further deterioration and even complete breakdown in the Israeli-Turkish relations.

Moreover, Levene's account is important not just for his assessment of the implications of the military coup on Turkey's commitments to the NATO alliance, but also because it refers to the transit immigrants i.e. Jewish refugees from Iran and Syria; whose status was an important factor in understanding the events surrounding the 1982 Holocaust and genocide Conference held in Tel Aviv. Although this issue will be assessed in detail in the fourth chapter, Levene's statement vis à vis the military coup reveals that he felt that the change in the executive would not change Turkish policy regarding this sensitive issue.

#### *The Military Coup and the Fight Against Terrorism*

As noted earlier, the military had identified terrorism as a major issue facing the country, and therefore they established a counter-terrorism force soon after the coup. Since the latter group was handled by the military six days after the demonstration in Konya, the former element was also addressed by the military in the form of an intelligence/army counter-terrorism force. Alon Liels recall in an oral interview:

As soon as the military took charge they established an intelligence/army force which was led by Ömer Engin Lütem. He was the acting deputy director of the Turkish MFA and the director of the research department. Lütem was also a very well-known Turkish ambassador, so he could bring his diplomatic experience also as a semi-intelligence director. We need to remember that 1980–1981 was the prime time of terrorism within Turkey,

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<sup>26</sup> Jerusalem to Tel Aviv et al. re: Military Coup and Relations with Israel, 14 September 1980, ISA/MFA/0002Q84; 'Olei Ma'avar' is the Hebrew acronym for transit immigrants.

which led to the anarchy, but also abroad [ASALA] against Turkish diplomats. Both were considered as a national security problem. On average, during that time, one Turkish diplomat was assassinated abroad by Armenian terrorists every month, which made this the busiest department in MFA at that time. We have tried to come very close to Lütem but at that time he served also as deputy director of Turkish MFA so we could not approach him at all. He did not agree to give us credit for any kind of help.<sup>27</sup>

Liel's oral account provides a clear idea as to the degree to which terrorism was a substantial national security problem at the time of the military coup, it also provides a snapshot as to how the Israeli diplomats identified this factor as an important way of achieving a rapprochement with Turkey, specifically with the military generals. A full overview of the influence of the fight against terrorism on Israeli-Turkish relations, especially in the context of the Armenian campaign, will be provided in the subsequent chapters.

### **Israeli-Turkish Relations: The End of an Era? (December 1980)**

The Israeli MFA's relatively positive assessment of the developments during September 1980 proved over-optimistic. By December 1980 the military regime had decided to follow through with the Turkish MFA's earlier decision to downgrade the Israeli Turkish relations to the level of chargé d'affaires. A recently declassified telegram written by the Israeli special ambassador to Turkey (1978–1980) Moshe Sasson, to David Kimhi, the Israeli MFA CEO, reflects on this decision:

Our [Israel MFA] current evaluation is that the Turkish MFA received the army generals' consent to downgrade relations with us. There is a consensus regarding this evaluation, among us [MFA], the IISO and the IDF representative in Turkey. [...] Based on this evaluation we have suggested a number of operative actions: we can approach the Turkish generals via Western army generals, particularly in the US. We can also try to approach Turgut Özal, who is currently the Turkish Minister of Finance [under the military] via third party American and German businessmen.

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<sup>27</sup> Oral interview with Alon Liel, 24 July 2017, Mevaseret Zion, Israel.

Özal can approach the Turkish army generals to change their decision against us if Turkey receives an economic aid package. [...] all of the above is based on our [the embassy's] evaluation that we cannot change the decision unless we convince the Turkish army generals to change it.<sup>28</sup>

Sasson points out the importance of approaching third party representatives as a means of engaging with the decision makers in the military regime to try somehow to change the decision to downgrade the countries' relations. Eli Shaked, the former Israeli consul in Ankara and later in Istanbul (1980–1984), recalls in an oral interview:

Moshe Sasson was a Middle Eastern specialist, with great connections in Turkey since the 1960s when he served there; Sasson thought that because he knew the Turkish foreign minister, İlder Türkmen, he could change the Turkish verdict. Sasson also asserted that he could propose to Türkmen that only the title can change formally to chargé d'affaires but still Israel would have a very experienced senior Israeli diplomat in Ankara so basically, Sasson would function as an ambassador. In a very non-diplomatic manner, Turkman refused, saying 'do not play those games with us'.<sup>29</sup>

Shaked's oral account helps to cast light, not just on the Israeli anxiety about the Turkish decision to downgrade relations in December 1980, but also on how some Israeli senior diplomats thought that their personality and diplomatic prestige could make a difference to the Turks' decision making, mainly via personal connections. That seems to have been optimistic and ultimately misguided, however. In another report, dated 24 December 1980, Manasseh Zipory, the Israeli consul in Istanbul, wrote another evaluation voicing his concerns and proposing specific individuals who could be used as last-minute moderators for Israel:

We [the consul and the ambassador] were notified today that, along with the Turkish decision to officially downgrade the relations with us, formal Turkish representatives had already departed to Arab countries to demand the value of that action against us. [...] Our advice is to continue to bypass the Turkish MFA and the Minister himself [İlder Türkmen], so that we can

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<sup>28</sup> Declassified Special telegram from Ankara to Jerusalem, 15 December 1980/ISA/MFA/0002Q841,1.

<sup>29</sup> Oral interview with Eli Sheked, 25 July 2017, Modi'in, Israel.

approach the elite Turkish generals, or academic and commercial Turkish elites to make them listen to our side of the story. [...] further, we [Israel] have also recommended authorising individuals in the US such as Solarz [i.e. Jewish congressman Stephen Joshua Solarz] and others to create a negative response to the Turkish move against us.<sup>30</sup>

While this document outlines very clearly that the Israeli MFA already acknowledged the Turkish decision to officially downgrade the relations, the Israelis were keen to employ American power against the Turkish decision, specifically targeting the military elite. This strategy was based upon the renewed tension between the Americans and the Soviets after the 1979 Soviet invasion to Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution, both events that significantly reduced the American influence in the region. The Israeli MFA identified this context as a source of common ground and as means to a mutual American Israeli end: to reconcile the Turkish elite and to strengthen the Israeli-Turkish-American relations so as to maintain the Cold War security balance in the Middle East.

### **Encouraging American Influence**

#### *Congressman Stephen Solarz to Turkish Military General Hayder Saltik*

There is evidence that this final recommendation was acted on by two American congressmen: Stephen Solarz, who served as a US Congressional Representative from New York, and Jim Wright, Former Speaker of the US House of Representatives (1987–1989) and a Democrat representing Texas in the American Congress. Both of these congressmen appear to have acted as American advocates of Israel's interests, writing letters in unconditional support, alerting Turkey to the potentially severe consequences of the suspension of Israeli-Turkish relations and to American interests in the region. In the first letter, signed by Solarz and addressed to the Turkish military general Hayder Saltik, the Secretary-General of the National Security Council, Solarz notes to Saltik at the outset: "I write to you as a friend of Turkey who is seriously concerned about the Turkish Government's recent decision to downgrade its diplomatic relations with Israel".<sup>31</sup> Congressmen Solarz continues to assess Turkey's foreign policy orientation:

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<sup>30</sup> Istanbul to the Ambassador in Ankara and to MFA Jerusalem, 24 December 1980, ISA/MFA/00038CX/1.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Solarz to General Hayder Saltik, 12 December, 1980, ISA/MFA/00038CX,



I don't have to tell you that the principal reason for the widespread support in my country for aid to Turkey has been Turkey's commitment to democracy and its willingness to take positions in the international arena which broadly reflects its Western orientation. [...] In this respect, the fact that Turkey was the only Muslim country to have high level diplomatic relations with Israel was deeply appreciated in the US and generated considerable good will. [...] In view of these considerations, Turkey's decision to downgrade the relations with Israel is practically unfortunate, since it will tend to weaken the ability of those of us who are trying to build the broadest possible base of support for US-Turkish relations in our efforts. [...] If anything can possibly be done to reverse this decision, I believe it would be not only extremely constructive but in the mutual benefit of both of our countries.<sup>32</sup>

*Congressman Jim Wright to Turkey's Ambassador Şükrü Elekdağ*

In the second letter, Congressman Wright addresses Turkey's ambassador in Washington DC, Şükrü Elekdağ. Like Solarz, Wright emphasises the possible negative implications for the Americans of the deterioration in relations between Jerusalem and Ankara:

With Iran and Iraq at war, your country [Turkey] has been put under new pressure to reduce its ties with Israel. As I understand it, your government appears to be yielding to this pressure to downgrade your diplomatic relations with Israel. [...] As a friend of Turkey, and one who fought Turkey's fight in the American Congress, I find this extremely regrettable. I am chagrined when colleagues who supported my resolution on arms sales to Turkey ask me how this happened. [...] Let me say this, there is no end to blackmail. [...] Mr. Ambassador, there are in the world today many extremist forces whose goals are not peace, freedom and democracy. [...] It is very important that Turkey does everything it can to straighten these moderate elements, and to discourage the extremists who push us all—your country, my country and much of the world—

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

unwittingly toward the abyss. [...] It is my fervent hope that your government will reconsider its action concerning Israel and that it will find a way to rectify this unfortunate decision before it is further implemented.<sup>33</sup>

Both Solarz and Wright advocated for Israel and clearly set out the possible negative implications of the Israeli-Turkish rupture, one of which was that it would encourage 'extremist forces whose goals are not peace' (possibly referring to the Soviet Union and fundamentalism). Set against these extremist forces in the region, both Solarz and Wright emphasised the value of unity. More importantly, mainly Solarz emphasised the idea that a deterioration in Israeli-Turkish relations in turn reduced the willingness of 'Jewish forces' in the US to stimulate good American-Turkish relations. Another important input here was given to the change in Turkey's character from secular to pro-Muslim. These references, even if not mentioned explicitly, are to the Soviets and Fundamentalists, both of whom, as noted earlier in this chapter, deeply concerned Kenan Evren and the other Turkish military elite. These letters also express Israel's vision of the new Middle East of the late Cold War years, and how keeping the old alliances alive was something both the Americans and Israelis held as a shared interests.

### **The 'Second Cold War', American Foreign Policy and the Question of Israeli-Turkish Relations, (December 1981)**

Between 1981 and late 1982 relations were suspended with almost no direct contact between the two governments and their MFA officials. More specifically, since the reduction of relations became a reality in the early months of 1981, the short-term goal of the Israeli diplomats was just keeping their 'heads above water', i.e. making sure that some minimal communication with the Turks remained and avoiding a complete breakdown of relations. In this respect, MFA officials from both countries attempted to communicate on the basis of sub-state actors, making use of the American Jewish organisations and the Turkish Jewish elite as their informal, and almost exclusive, diplomatic channels.

Alongside the downgrading of Israeli-Turkish relations in January 1981, and after the DECA agreement between Turkey and the US was signed on 29 March 1980,

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<sup>33</sup> Jim Wright to Şükrü Elekdağ, 19 December 1980, ISA/MFA/00038CX, 1.

another important development took place in the US that would open new opportunities for the Israelis; namely the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as the 40th President of the United States. Reagan's election marked a transition to a much more hard-line approach to the Soviet bloc, highlighted by a speech in 1981 when he noted that "The West won't contain communism, it will transcend communism. It will dismiss it as some bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages are even now being written".<sup>34</sup> Reagan's hard line against the Kremlin included harsh rhetoric, a renewed arms race and confrontational policies and increased East-West polarisation.<sup>35</sup> That said, as Dan Stone and Beth Fischer argue, although Reagan's hard line against the Kremlin was evident in the early 1980s, it was not a consistent policy throughout the two terms of his presidency. In 1983, for example, Reagan reduced his harsh rhetoric and even initiated talks with the Soviets regarding arm reductions,<sup>36</sup> while in 1984 Reagan had adopted a more 'conciliatory posture' towards the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in this context, as a key theatre in his 'second Cold War', the regional alliances in the Middle East assumed renewed importance.

With that important development in mind, a document prepared by Shlomo Bino, from the Israeli MFA, as background to the forthcoming visit to Ankara of the American Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, assesses Israeli-Turkish relations up to November 1981. As Bino noted in his assessment:

It is important that Haig would stress to the Turks that the Americans are concerned about the status of Israeli-Turkish relations, and that the Americans cannot submit to such a status. We (Israel MFA) should make an attempt to keep the relations the way they are now, because another worsening will necessarily mean a complete breakdown of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. [...] We, [the Israelis], receive a cold, and sometimes hostile response, which the Turks in this opportunity do not spare any words to scold the Israelis for their actions, and to outline once

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<sup>34</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Commencement Address at Notre Dame," 17 May 1981, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, 17, 532.

<sup>35</sup> Beth Fischer, "US Foreign Policy Under Reagan and Bush," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, eds. Odd Arne Westad and Melvyn P. Leffler (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 267–88.

<sup>36</sup> Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 175–76.

<sup>37</sup> Beth A. Fischer, "Visions of Ending the Cold War: Triumphalism and U.S. Soviet Policy in the 1980s," in *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945–1990*, eds., Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Bernd Rother (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 306.

again the Turkish position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, siding with the Palestinians. [...] It is quite common in Turkey these days to assess that the downgrading of the bilateral relations by Turkey has been in the interest of the West, specifically, Europe and US. There is no doubt that the silence from the West helps the Turks to ignore the possible outcomes of their policy against Israel, ignoring the fact that good relations with Israel are fundamentally important to the Western bloc. [...] It is extremely important therefore, that the Turks acknowledge that the highest American politicians show concern about the stagnant Israeli-Turkish relations, otherwise the Turks will continue to assess the American non-response as an assent.<sup>38</sup>

This document reveals the extent of anxiety among Israeli officials that the suspended relations between Israel and Turkey could potentially deteriorate even further to a complete breakdown. More importantly, it indicates how the Israeli diplomats sought to situate the Ankara-Jerusalem conflict within the context of the renewed tension of the wider Cold War, and Reagan's hard-line rhetoric against the Soviets, thus exploiting the latter for their own diplomatic needs. Specifically, given the circumstances of the Turkish energy crisis and the country's closer ties with the Arab world as a result of this, Turkey's foreign policy during that specific period was closer to neutrality in the Cold War superpower rivalry. Bino and the MFA highlighted this as troubling and sought to use Israeli-Turkish relations as a litmus test for Turkey's continued commitment to 'the interests of the West'. The decision to approach Alexander Haig was not only because he was the US Secretary of State at the time, and thus had access to the highest echelons of Turkey's government, but also because, as the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, he also had close ties with Turkey's military elite.<sup>39</sup> These were definitely an important political force in Turkey at that time, and therefore could help the Israeli diplomats deliver their messages to the Turkish

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<sup>38</sup> Jerusalem to Washington DC, Re: Assessment of Current Bilateral Relations with Turkey and Background Information to the visit of American Secretary of State in Turkey, 10 December 1981, ISA/MFA/00038OP. At the time this document was written, Alexander Haig was the US Secretary of State (1981–1982). Previously, Haig was the Deputy National Security Advisor under Henry Kissinger, before acting as Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces in Europe (1974–1979).

<sup>39</sup> For more on the close engagement between Turkey's military, civil society and political establishment see, for instance: Nilüfer Narlı, "Concordance and Discordance in Turkish Civil-Military Relations, 1980–2002," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 215–25; and Murat Kasapsaraçoğlu, "Harmonization of Turkey's Political, Economic, and Military Interests in the 1950s: Reflections on Turkey's Middle East Policy," *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 332–48 to mention a few.

leadership.<sup>40</sup> In a first-hand account, Turkey's veteran diplomat, and Ankara's ambassador to Israel 2009–2010, Oğuz Çelikkol, recalls that Haig and Kissinger were well respected among Turkey's diplomatic and army elite. Both had a profound understanding of Turkey's interests in the Cyprus crisis of 1974, and had given Turkish diplomats an open door to their offices during that period.<sup>41</sup>

**Leveraging the Armenian Genocide for Rapprochement: Meetings  
Between Jewish Organisations and Kamuran Gürün, Turkey's Deputy  
Foreign Minister (1982)**

*A View from MFA Jerusalem*

Although the Israeli MFA and its diplomats undertook several efforts to make use of American influence in the region, these attempts failed in the short term if we consider that by April 1982, diplomatic relations between the Turks and the Israelis remained stagnant. This was mainly the result of Turkey's military elite continuing to strike a balance between satisfying its energy suppliers from the Arab/Muslim world, and the need to keep Israel and the American Jews close enough to gain leverage in the US. Into this mix, however, came the Armenian campaign, encompassing both academic pressure and terrorism. While this represented a complex challenge, it also provided an opportunity for Jerusalem to seek a rapprochement with Ankara. Given that there was no direct diplomatic engagement, however, the Turkish MFA initiated contact with Jewish organisations in the Western world.

The discussion in this section focuses more on the internal American political lobbying. The important archival material here highlights the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations in a Cold War context, but explores this through the channel of ethnic lobbying. The discussion investigates how, in the absence of direct contact between Ankara and Jerusalem, Turkish and Jewish American organisations were used as a diplomatic channel. As this section will demonstrate, both Turkish Jewish and World Jewish Congress (hereafter WJC) representatives knew how to leverage the Armenian genocide—precisely the four related issues examined in the second and third parts of this thesis—as an issue of shared concern with Turkey.

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<sup>40</sup> For more on Haig's position as the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO forces in Europe, see Harvey Sicherman, "Patriot: Alexander M. Haig," *Orbis* 54, no. 3 (2010): 339–55.

<sup>41</sup> Oral Interview with Oğuz Çelikkol, 21 July 2017, Istanbul, Turkey.

In an oral interview, Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to the United States (1993–1996), observes that Tip O'Neill, the former speaker of the United States House of Representatives during the 1980s, noted that 'all politics is local', meaning that all US politicians need to assess the political climate in their county and district first and foremost. If a politician represents many Armenians (as in California), then that clearly affects the stance that politician is likely to adopt, as was indeed the case in California with respect to the Jews and the Armenian issue.<sup>42</sup> Rabinovich further asserts in the interview that more generally in regard to the US ethnic lobbies: "the Jewish lobby seemed to always be a bit restrained if they needed to support something that went against US national interests, while the Armenians and the Greeks did not follow that guideline".<sup>43</sup> In Rabinovich's experience, the Armenians and the Greek lobbies knew that they were asking for something not as US citizens but in the name of their ethnicity and their home country; in other words, 'they are shouting from a safe distance'; i.e. it is much easier for these lobbies to do that in the US because they feel very protected by the first amendment of the US constitution granting them the right to practice ethnic lobbying.<sup>44</sup>

To this end, and with respect to the Armenian genocide, both the Greeks and the Armenians had an obvious joint enemy, the Turks. The Jewish American official Richard Perle, recounts in his oral interview that "partly because of their hostility to Turkey, the Greek American organisations got heavily involved in this [the Armenian genocide related affairs]. Wherever the Greek American organisations saw an opportunity to embarrass Turkey, they jumped at that opportunity".<sup>45</sup>

Despite the different diplomatic backgrounds of Rabinovich and Perle, both agree that the ethnic lobbies in the US should be seen as mostly influenced by domestic issues, charged ethnic relations between immigrant communities and attempts to influence the American political arena. That said, the following sections demonstrate how and why during this sensitive period the focus of the WJC was on external geopolitical factors underpinning the Middle East, especially on the suspended Israeli Turkish relations.

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<sup>42</sup> Oral interview with Itamar Rabinovich, 2 February 2018, Tel Aviv, Israel.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Oral interview with Richard Perle via Skype, 19 January 2016.

With this background in mind, a report focusing on the visit of the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, Kamuran Gürün, to Jewish organisation leaders in Paris and New York was written by Avner Arazi, the Israeli consul in Ankara. The aim of the visit, according to Arazi's report, was to initiate informal discussions to clarify how the Turkish MFA and the Jewish organisations could help each other's interests while the diplomatic channels between Ankara and Jerusalem remained closed. It should be stressed straightaway that Gürün is considered to be one of the important and most significant voices denying the Armenian genocide. Gürün himself wrote, together with other Turkish diplomats of that era (such as Esat Uras) and others, the perpetrator's narrative, promoting a narrative of denial which bowdlerises the context of the events of 1915.<sup>46</sup> Gürün was therefore a natural choice to advocate against the Armenian accusations of genocide.

As the international campaign for recognition of the Armenian genocide proceeded, both via terrorist attacks and subsequently by diplomacy and political lobbying, the more problematic the suspended relations between Ankara and Jerusalem became for Turkey. This reality is entrenched across chapters four, five and six of this thesis, while the next chapter suggests that the main drive—among other circumstances allowing it—for the eventual normalisation of relations was the Turks' recognition of the ability of Israel and the American Jews to help them combat the emerging Armenian and international pressure to recognise the 1915 genocide (a realisation encouraged by Israel).

Nevertheless, accidentally or not, due to the importance of the emerging 'Armenian question', and although Gürün was not at the time the top-ranking foreign policy authority in the Turkish MFA, it was he who was chosen to meet the Jewish organisations, Arazi addresses this in his report:

In all the meetings Gürün gave a detailed account of the Armenian problem; in his country he is one of the top experts on this issue, and his research on the Armenian question is included in his most recent published book. [...] the efforts the office [MFA] put in connecting the Jewish organisations with Gürün were all in all very productive. Although these

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<sup>46</sup> See Gürün, *The Armenian File*, and Uras, *The Armenians in History*; for more on this see debate among many others see: Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 17, 220; Bloxham and Göçek, "The Armenian Genocide".

efforts will not necessarily bring immediate positive results with respect to Israeli-Turkish relations, it is thought these meetings had some positive outcomes. [...] Gürün, I think, was very impressed by two factors in his trip: first, the immediate and clear mutual interests of Israel and the Jews worldwide. Second, the impact of the Jews worldwide and the potential benefit for the Turks of such impact. [...] hence, if these 'deals' will not be carried out for some reason in the future, Turkey will at least know how to consider the Israeli interests every time the question of Israeli-Turkish relations comes up.<sup>47</sup>

Arazi then summed up the meetings:

Gürün suggested a few points which could increase Israel's value to be equally attractive to Turkey's interests with the Arab world: (1) the Armenian issue. i.e. we [Israel and the Jewish organisations] can make two specific efforts: first, to help the Turks with international advocacy about the Armenian claims of genocide: i.e. parliaments, media and public engagements. Second, Israel and the Jews will avoid any victim to victim sympathy with the Armenians and their battle against Turkey. These measures, of course will be notified to the Turks in advance so they can credit Israel for their efforts. (2) Cyprus, as far as possible we [Israel] should make an effort as far as any vote against Turkey in the UN. (3) Strasbourg; the European parliament and its relevant institutions there are many Jews who are holding top ranking positions. Turkey needs help with advocacy, and with any anti-Turkish decisions on violating human rights.' (4) Greece; Turkey needs help from any possible source.<sup>48</sup>

Arazi's report demonstrates how (from the point of view of the Turkish MFA) the diplomatic void between the two countries should be filled. As the document clarifies, the Turks acknowledged that their foreign policy issues, especially the Armenian genocide, could trigger a mutual benefit to the Turks and Israel.

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<sup>47</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Notes on Gürün's Meetings with Jewish Organisations in France and US, 22 April 1982, MFA/ISA/0003BPW/291, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



*WJC and Gürün: A View from Jerusalem and New York*

Three months later, a meeting was held between Kamuran Gürün, and Jewish American organisations under the heading of an official meeting between the Turkish MFA and the Jewish American leadership. The meeting was held in New York City under the brokerage of Jeck Vassid from the Turkish Jewish elite, who had also accompanied Gürün to the meeting, along with the Turkish ambassador to the US, Şükrü Elekdağ, who was also mentioned earlier in this chapter. In a summary document written by Elan Steinberg, a member of the WJC, after joint greetings, Gürün was anxious for the Jewish organisations' support, particularly with respect to the "ever-growing Armenian problem".<sup>49</sup> Gürün's analysis included the scope of the short history of the 'Armenian question', highlighting the terror issues supported by the Soviets, but as Gürün asserted, "the allegations of 'genocide' had a greater basis in propaganda rather than reality".<sup>50</sup> Gürün further highlighted in his account terrorist attacks in Los Angeles, where two Turkish diplomats had been assassinated during the 1970s, as a geographical and political zone which was particularly sensitive with respect to the Armenian problem and as an area of attention for the Jewish American leadership.<sup>51</sup>

The Jewish representative from the WJC, Israel Singer, replied to Gürün that the Jewish-American position had been demonstrated through the United States Holocaust Memorial Council (hereafter USHMC), namely that the Holocaust was a unique event and should be memorialised separately. Singer further referred Gürün to a recent meeting with Elekdağ in Washington DC that had discussed the successful attempts to block an Armenian wing in the memorial. Furthermore, with respect to Armenian terrorism, and the Los Angeles front, Singer promised that he would put this request forward when he next discussed them with the leadership of the Jewish community during his forthcoming visit on the Holocaust memorial day, so as to make sure that the Holocaust remained a separate issue from the Armenian experience.<sup>52</sup>

Lastly, the document outlines the counter requests of the Jewish elite from Gürün, asking him to consider allowing the Turkish-Jewish organisations to be affiliated with the Jewish-American organisation, which was prohibited according to

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<sup>49</sup> World Jewish Congress: New York to Jerusalem, re: Meeting with Turkish Under-Secretary of State, 7 April 1982, MFA/ISA/0003BPW, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Turkish law. Gürün reply that upon his return to Turkey he would address the issue as a high priority for the Turkish MFA, “towards a quite positive response”.<sup>53</sup>

*The WJC and the Question of Israeli-Turkish Relations*

A week after Elan Steinberg’s report was delivered, a two-page response, which heavily criticised the American Jews, was sent by Natan Lerner, the chair of the Israeli office of the WJC in Jerusalem. In his fascinating response, Lerner wrote the following:

The image of Turkey in the US is not a glorious one: the dictatorial regime, the brutal invasion of Cyprus, and the memory of the Armenian genocide are some of the elements for the rather tarnished image of Turkey; an image that indeed needs to be improved, and the Jews of America could be helpful. [...], your response was to promise to separate explicitly the Holocaust from the Armenian experience, thus relieving the Turks of an embarrassment. On your part, the WJC asked that Turkey allow its 30,000 strong Jewish community to be affiliated with the WJC.<sup>54</sup>

Lerner emphasised Turkey’s problematic reputation in the US to remind the American Jews that they could have used the Armenian and Cyprus issues, among others, to claim much more from Gürün and Elekdağ, especially in respect to a rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish relations. When one comes to assess the Turkish request, specifically in the context of the Israeli-Turkish relations, Lerner and the Israeli executive board had different views:

We find this entire episode disturbing. Here was a case where the Turks, suffering from an unenviable image in the US ask the Jewish leaders to be helpful in projecting the case of the Turks to American public opinion in a more favourable light. Such a service to the Turks is a valuable one indeed. [...] such an affiliation [the Turkish Jews with the American WJC], desirable as it is, is minor in comparison with another issue. i.e. Turkey’s hostile policy to the interests of 3,335,000 Jews in Israel.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> WJC Israeli Executive, Jerusalem to New York City, 3 May 1982, MFA/ISA/0003BPW, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

The Jerusalem executive was, therefore, making an explicit claim with respect to the Israeli-Turkish relations crisis: arguably that the WJC represents Jewish interests worldwide, including the views of Israeli Jews, which so far had been overlooked in the collaboration between the Turks and the WJC in the US.

This letter from the Jerusalem executive conveys very clearly that Jewish assistance in respect to Turkey's multi-dimensional problems in respect to the Armenian genocide and the Cyprus question were being under-priced, and this was true when one considers points made previously; i.e., apart from the Armenian campaign, Turkey was facing an already problematic public opinion in the US, that could have been leveraged for much more meaningful action in respect to the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations.

Furthermore, the meeting correspondence uncovers that Gürün knew how to employ the hierarchy of victimhood to stimulate cooperation with Israel and American Jews in regards to the Armenian campaign. Such a hierarchy could satisfy Israel which commemorates the Holocaust as a unique event, and of course this hierarchy was extremely important to some militant Jewish-American Holocaust survivors who were still alive during the 1980s. It seems that what drove 'the perceived poor outcome' in the opinion of the Jerusalem branch of the WJC was that the importance of Israeli-Turkish relations was seen differently in the US and in Israel, each being influenced by their own local politics and regional settings.

### **Further Encouraging American Influence: The Lebanon War and Counter Terrorism (1982)**

An attempt to assassinate Israel's ambassador in London (1979–1982), Shlomo Argov, led to the Knesset's decision, on 4 June 1982, to invade Southern Lebanon in order to secure Israel's northern border, and this conflict soon escalated into a full-scale war.<sup>56</sup> Since this occurred during the midst of the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations, Israel was dealing with two Middle Eastern fronts: first, national-security problems in terms of securing its northern borders, and Jewish and Israeli institutions, against Palestinian

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<sup>56</sup> Immediately after the Argov assassination attempt, the Israeli government approved the IDF to enter Southern Lebanon to secure the northern border of Israel. The operation, entitled: "Operation Peace for Galilee" or *Mivtsa Sheleg* [in Hebrew], is a synonym for the First Lebanon War. See Israel's Cabinet Decision, 6 June 1982, to launch the operation: [www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook6/Pages/3%20Israel%20Cabinet%20Decision-%206%20June%201982.aspx](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook6/Pages/3%20Israel%20Cabinet%20Decision-%206%20June%201982.aspx) (accessed 15 February 2019).

terrorism; and, second, the deteriorating relations with Turkey which could yet deteriorate to the point of complete breakdown. Accordingly, because of Turkey's need for close relations with the Arab countries supplying its energy, and the resultant pressure to boycott Israel and support the Palestinians' national aspirations, the Turks did not cooperate with Israel's invasion of Lebanon, although the two countries had mutual anti-terror interests in uprooting anti-Turkish (Armenian) and anti-Israeli terrorist organisations from southern Lebanon. This is the focal point of the third chapter.

Although the rationale for a shared approach to Middle Eastern terrorism emanating from Lebanon, had given the military administration a good reason to align with Israel, by late 1982, Israeli-Turkish relations were still at freezing point. At that time, therefore, another attempt was made to approach the American offices. Stephen Solarz planned a visit to Turkey but, before arriving in Ankara, Solarz had a stopover in Bonn, meeting there with the Israeli ambassador to West Germany. On being informed of this planned meeting, Hanan Bar-On, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (1979–1987) sent a telegram to the Israeli ambassador in Bonn, Yitzhak Ben Ari, with clear instructions for the meeting with Solarz:

Solarz is a young and vibrant Congressmen and he is a great supporter of us [Israel]. Although Solarz is critical of our policies sometimes, he frequently delivers messages for us according to what we ask him to say. Solarz has been very close to Turkey upon our request, and now he has quite a lot of influence in Ankara. Even though there is nothing urgent now between us and the Turks that requires intervention, we know that Ankara might take a decision to cut the relationship with us instantly with no further notice. If you can please remind Solarz that the Lebanon operation was a problem for them, but on the other hand, it has weakened the Syrian position in Lebanon which means it also affects the Soviet influence there. This is not something Turkey can ignore.<sup>57</sup>

We can learn from this document that Bar-On had no urgent message to deliver to Ankara. That said, as long as relations with Ankara were suspended, Bar-On kept his alternative networks active and his American contacts alert regarding the possibility of

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<sup>57</sup> Jerusalem to Bonn, re: a response to 566 5936/ISA/MFA/0003ZB, 1–2

a complete boycott of relations. Therefore, with every visit of an American diplomat to Turkey, Bar-On made sure that Jerusalem was part of the conversation. Meanwhile, by 1983 Reagan had continued with his hard line, accusing the Soviets of being an ‘evil empire’ in one of his most famous speeches of that period.<sup>58</sup> With respect to the main argument of this thesis, Reagan’s rhetoric provided an important context which reveals the consistent line the Israeli MFA was using to persuade Turkey to join a united front against Soviet-supported Middle East terrorism.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that between 1979 and 1983—against the backdrop of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the fundamentalist revolution in Iran—Israeli diplomats sought to keep Turkey as a close ally in order to maintain the close Cold War security alliance along with the Americans. From the Israeli perspective, Turkey’s energy crisis and social-political chaos of 1978–1980, and the possibility of a fundamentalist revolution, put additional pressure on Israel to maintain the delicate geopolitical balance in the region, with the events in Afghanistan and Iran making Turkey’s role even more important than before. The Israeli diplomats therefore used the Cold War fears of the Americans, heightened by Reagan’s confrontational policies against the Soviets, as a diplomatic tool to encourage them to pressure Turkey to normalise relations. From the Turkish perspective, the military elite’s fears about a possible fundamentalist revolution also played a role, making good relations with Israel more politically controversial. The enactment of the Jerusalem Law by Israel, however, worked as a double-edged sword; apparently provoking the breakdown of relations with Ankara, but also unleashing Islamist sentiments within Turkey that in turn provoked the military coup that offered the opportunity for Israel to engage with a leadership instinctively less hostile to it. In September 1980, however, it was too early to tell if this would actually improve Israeli-Turkish relations because the military elite still had to strike a pragmatic balance between the Arab/Muslim world and its commitment to NATO and regional alliances.

The renewed bipolar tension in the light of Afghanistan, Iran, the Polish crisis

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, Orlando, FL, 8 March 1983, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Ronald Reagan*, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1984), 364. See also: [www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/30883b](http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/30883b)

and the election of Ronald Reagan, made the weakened Western alliance in the Middle East a matter of greater concern for both Israel and the US. The Israeli MFA used this concern to enlist American support to revitalise its relations with Turkey. Although in the short term, this strategy did not work, it seems that the Americans did cooperate with Jerusalem: Haig and Kissinger were approached to advocate for Israel, among others who were respected in both Turkey and Israel.

The chapter argues that, within this complex Cold War geopolitical context, the campaign for recognition of the Armenian genocide, with all of its emerging impacts, played a vital role in terms of giving Israel the opportunity to demonstrate its worth to Turkey. In the context of the emerging 'Armenian question', the Israeli influence on the Americans was acknowledged by the Turks during the 1980s as one of the main levers for influencing US policy on the Armenian genocide. Specifically, once relations with Ankara were suspended from January 1981, the contested memories of the Armenian genocide become an important component of these suspended relations, mainly because the Turks put a stop to all co-operation and diplomatic engagement in all other areas. This was the point in time when Jerusalem sought to exploit the opportunities offered by regional terrorism as a potential diplomatic avenue to find favour with the Turks, which is where the focus on ASALA begins.

# Chapter 4

## From Suspension to Normalisation (December 1983– January 1988)

### Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that set against the backdrop of Turkey's economic improvement, political stability and the emerging international pressure in respect to an awakening of the memory of the Armenian genocide, between 1983 and 1988 Ankara initiated a gradual normalisation of relations with Jerusalem. Ankara's aim was to get Israel, the Anti-Defamation League (hereafter, ADL), and the WJC to help improve Turkey's image in the US, especially to mitigate against the possibility of the Armenian genocide being acknowledged or represented in American political and cultural fora. The Turkish initiative was based on an exaggerated belief that Israel and American Jewish organisations could provide a degree of protection against Armenian aspirations in terms of influencing the decision making of the US administration and the Congress in respect to the sensitive Armenian matter.

By 1983/1984 the focus of the efforts of diaspora Armenian groups had shifted from terrorism to “more constructive memorial work”, as Donald Bloxham describes it, making international pressure Turkey's most crucial foreign policy concern from the mid-1980s.<sup>1</sup> Building on Bloxham's work, this chapter explores how Turkey's economic improvement, political stability and the emerging international pressure in respect to an awakening of the memory of the Armenian genocide helped forge a rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish relations. Therefore, while the previous chapter focused on the geopolitics of the Middle East in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the emerging ‘Armenian question’, much of the current chapter centres on the work of the ADL and WJC around two main themes: first, improving the Turkish public image in the US; and second, blocking Armenian commemoration initiatives subject to a gradual normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations. The historical milestones identified in this chapter will be explored in more depth in the third part of the thesis.

Focusing on more constructive memorial work, much of the efforts of diaspora Armenian communities from the mid-1980s concentrated on raising awareness in the

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<sup>1</sup> Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 219.

US and Western Europe, as the final two chapters of the thesis will show. Israeli-Turkish relations, meanwhile, remained frozen until 1985, hence much of the bilateral relations were still undertaken in Washington and New York, the headquarters of many of the Jewish American organisations.

Given the above, Turkey's NATO membership played an important part in the Israeli MFA strategy. Although the intensity of the renewed Cold War had already declined from its peak in the early 1980s, Reagan was still in office and thus the core policy of confronting the Soviets continued. This meant that superpower politics was still an important factor pressing for an Israeli-Turkish reconciliation, which continued to intertwine with the Armenian issue.

This chapter consists of three parts. The first part charts the transformation from the military regime to Turgut Özal's civil administration in late 1983 in the context of the emerging Armenian campaign in Western Europe. The second part, meanwhile, reviews the degree to which the American Jewish organisations sought to trade Özal's requests for aid with the Armenian campaign against improved Israeli-Turkish relations. This part of the chapter also introduces for the first time in the thesis the pro-Turkish faction in the Israeli MFA, who argued for normalisation of relations at almost any cost. Lastly, the chapter reviews Turkey's relations with the EEC since Turkey's first failed application to become a member of the EEC is a critical milestone in the thesis. This serves as important historical background to the USHMM and the Armenian resolutions that are explored in part three of the thesis.

### **From Military Coup to Civil Administration: Continuity or Change?**

#### **(November 1983)**

After more than three years of military regime, the elections of 6 November 1983 made Özal Turkey's Prime Minister. It should be noted that Özal, as Prime Minister (1983–1989) and then President (1989–1993), was a prominent figure who in many ways shaped Turkey's foreign policy orientation during those years. There is a quite extensive literature on Özal's contribution to the history of Turkish foreign policy and to a pro-Western pragmatic approach which benefited Israel's relations with Turkey,



among others.<sup>2</sup> On the Israeli-Turkish front, since taking office, Özal had applied a pro-Western economic policy and, therefore, in 1985 Turkey's economic condition had improved, meaning that Turkey was less dependent on the mercy of the Arab world for oil. Turkish economic rehabilitation enabled Turkey gradually to improve its relations with Israel. Bulent Aliriza, the Turkish diplomat, explains in an oral interview: "Between 1983 and 1985, it's Özal slowly beginning to get a handle on foreign policy... He [Özal] says: 'our most important weapon [is our] businessmen with briefcases'".<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Alon Liel adds another dimension regarding Özal's impact on Turkey's foreign policy starting from late 1983. In an oral interview he explains:

Özal was indeed pro-Western but also a religious Muslim. Under Özal's administration one notices Turkey's unique synthesis emerging. i.e. 'Quran in one hand, and a laptop on the other hand'. Deep into his administration as Prime Minister, Özal became more and more pro-Western. Later, during Özal's presidency (1989–1993), the pro-Western orientation was demonstrated by allowing the US military to attack Iraq from the Turkish border during the 1991 first Gulf War. Back then, Turkey was deep in Washington's pocket. This led to the bonanza in Israeli-Turkish-American relations in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup>

It appears that Özal was the right man at the right time for Turkey. Specifically, his experience in economic rehabilitation and the fact that he had been educated in and had worked in the US, gave hope that Turkey would realign with the West and become less dependent on the Arab world. In this context, attested by the fact that the military elite had already appointed him as Minister of Finance in late 1980, Özal's religiosity did not play a role and he was respected across the board. Ultimately, these circumstances paved the path for a relative rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish relation. From Liel's and Aliriza's oral accounts, it seems that without Özal's initial pro-Western impact on

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this: Erkan Ertosun, "Change and Leadership in Foreign Policy: The Case of Turgut Özal's Premiership in Turkey, 1983–1989," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2016): 47–66; Sedat Laçiner, "Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism," *USAK Yearbook*, 2 (2009): 153–205; Berdal Aral, "Dispensing with Tradition? Turkish Politics and International Society During the Özal Decade, 1983–1993," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 1 (2001): 72–88;

<sup>3</sup> Oral interview with Bulent Aliriza, 8 December 2015, Washington DC.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

Turkey's foreign policy from 1983, the Armenian factor could not be such a lever for normalisation.

### **Turkey's 'Narrative Boom' and the Armenian Genocide in the Late Cold War Context (1983–1985)**

This section outlines a number of factors that together created the circumstances in which a rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish relations appeared to be both possible and desirable for Turkey. Firstly, from late 1983, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, there was some relief in the terrorist activities undertaken by Palestinian and anti-Turkish groups, specifically Armenian terrorism. Secondly, by early 1985, severe pressure within Israeli society, especially from the liberal parties and Israeli human rights activists, meant that the war in Lebanon was in its final stages. The criticisms of the war had come to a head as a result, especially, of the 'Sabra and Shatila Massacre' in September 1983, as well as the fact that the IDF had lost 654 combatants during the war.<sup>5</sup> This removed a significant impediment to the normalisation of relations.

Another major strand in Turkey's thinking was the increasingly wide-ranging and sophisticated pressure from Armenian groups across the West to attain official recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide. This drove a boom in defensive narratives about that issue within Turkey but also intertwined with pressure to normalise relations between Ankara and Jerusalem. Between 1978 and 1988, the US Armenian ethnic lobby put forward an initiative to include the 1915 Armenian genocide at the USHMM exhibition in Washington DC. Given that most of the funds for the US memorial were American public donations, the US federal government launched an initiative labelled 'campaign to remember'.<sup>6</sup> This campaign was a golden opportunity for non-Jewish organisations and American Cold War ally governments, such as Chancellor Helmut Kohl's in West Germany, to attempt to influence the concept of the US memorial exhibition by making financial contributions.<sup>7</sup> Despite a substantial

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<sup>5</sup> Among many works on this topic see, for example, Aharon Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947* (London: Routledge, 2002). The 'Sabra and Shatila Massacre' took place between 16 and 18 September 1982, in the course of Israel's occupation of the south of Lebanon and Beirut, when the Israeli Defence Force and a Christian minority right-wing party entered the Palestinian camps and massacred 762 and 3,500 civilians.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the federal initiative 'Campaign to Remember', see the United States Holocaust Memorial Council report, 12 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A4GO, 1.

<sup>7</sup> For more about Helmut Kohl's government's attempts to influence the concept of the USHMM, see Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 84–153.

donation (\$3 million) to the memorial by the Armenian community in California, Israel's high-level access to the US administration and Congress provided the Turks with essential aid in blocking the Armenian initiative.

From Turkey's point of view, the growing impact of the 'Armenian question' in the capital city of its most important NATO ally—which threatened to showcase Turkey to the US public as perpetrators of genocide side-by-side with the crimes of the Nazis—convinced Ankara that Jerusalem was a critically important ally. These issues, as well as Armenian terrorism, are assessed in depth in the subsequent four empirical chapters, showing how these factors came together to help to restore Israeli-Turkish relations.

### **Özal's Visit to the US (1984–1985)**

On a methodological note, apart from one relevant document that is discussed in this section, no other declassified material could be found in the ISA to provide a snapshot of Israeli-Turkish relations during 1984. On 11 March 1984, the Israeli consul in Istanbul, Eli Shaked, reported to Jerusalem about President Reagan's reply to a telegram sent by Özal a few days earlier regarding the Armenian attempts to showcase the Turks as preparators of genocide in the US Congress. Shaked noted:

Reagan wrote to Özal that 'Americans and Turks know how huge and painful the sacrifice of the Turkish people has been to incorporate the economic and security program you have designed. The US have great admiration for Özal's leadership and skills, and the American people respect the challenges you are currently facing in the region. Over time, the US are confident that under your leadership Turkey will become stronger'.<sup>8</sup>

This short note from Reagan to Özal gives us a sense of how the US administration viewed Özal's leadership vis à vis the serious challenges Turkey had been facing in the previous few years. This was a vote of confidence, not just in respect to Özal's leadership, but also hinting that the Reagan administration understood what was at stake, and one can assume that disputed questions in Turkey's foreign policy, especially

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<sup>8</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: Turkish US Relations, 3 March 1984, ISA/MFA/0003BPS.

the Armenian genocide, could be addressed with sensitivity as perhaps was done by previous administrations in the past.

Returning to the question of Israeli-Turkish relations, by 1985, there were some signs of diplomatic progress. Özal repeated part of Gürün's 1982 trip to the US to meet the leaders of the ADL and the WJC. This visit underscores how important the American Jewish organisations were to the normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations deep into the 1980s.

An ISA document signed by an Israeli diplomat, Lavie, was issued between 1 April 1985 and 31 November 1985 (the precise date and first name is not recorded).<sup>9</sup> Lavie briefly summarised the outline of the meeting with Özal in order to update the Israeli MFA:

Hence, yesterday, the meeting took place and the participants were Kenneth Bialkin, [Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (1980s).], Israel Zinger [President of the WJC] and two representors of B'nai B'rith, myself, and Özal. [...] Özal spoke very warmly about Israel as one of its big supporters, and asked the Jewish organisations representatives not to include the Armenians in the Jewish Holocaust Museum [USHMM] that is planned to be established in Washington DC. [...] Zinger replied by saying that the Jewish Holocaust Museum would be established to commemorate the Jewish Holocaust, and to signify the Jewish case. Therefore, it is understood that other issues such as the Armenians [i.e. the Armenian genocide] would not be included.<sup>10</sup>

The first theme that was discussed by Özal with the Jewish organisations was the question of the Armenian genocide and the issues. It should be noted how Özal reiterated the message from the deputy foreign minister, Kamuran Gürün's, April 1982 visit to Paris and New York, regarding the importance of the Armenian issue if the diplomatic void between the countries were to be repaired. At this point, Lavie sheds light upon the Jewish-Israeli counter-demands from Özal:

Then, Bialkin and Zinger asked Özal to restore the level of diplomatic relations with Israel to the full delegation, including an ambassador. They

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<sup>9</sup> Washington to Jerusalem et al. re: Özal Visit in the US, ISA/MFA/0003BPS.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

[Bialkin and Zinger] pointed out that Egypt is currently the only Muslim state that conducts full diplomatic relations with Israel. Özal replied that Turkey needs to consider Saudi Arabian and Libyan pressure, and other Arab interests, however, Turkey feels an honest and deep friendship with Israel that was being conducted in many aspects.<sup>11</sup>

At this point in the meeting, Özal made some financial inquiries from the Jews and the US administration, as Lavie noted in the telegram:

Özal then asked if Egypt would receive extended American financial aid. Zinger responded by saying that Egypt might be granted such aid, because there is clearly sympathy within the American congress to Egypt, due to their openly conducting diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

In an oral interview with Kenneth Bialkin, Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations during the 1980s, he recalls attending the meeting with Özal: “When I met with Özal, he explained to me that he loved Israel, and that he will help Israel, but I should understand that the most important economic interest of Turkey is to export to the Arab world - full stop”.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Bialkin explains his own role as representing pan-Jewish interests and most importantly to maintain the Israeli interests in the meeting: “It was the right thing to do for people like myself, to be friendly and sympathetic with Turkey. The stagnant relations with Israel did not come out as blindly as they appeared at that time”.<sup>14</sup>

With respect to Bialkin’s account, Özal was trying to find a neutral path and maintain flexibility towards Israel and the Arab Muslim world. This might also have been driven by the fact that the DECA agreement was about to expire in December 1985 and therefore Özal was trying to create divide and conquer between the American Jews and the Israelis in order to get the agreement with the US renewed without making a commitment to Israel to normalise relations. While individuals such as Bialkin tried to show a united front to Özal in deference to Israel’s interests, i.e. insisting on the condition of normalisation of relations with Israel before Özal could get their full

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Oral interview with Kenneth Bialkin, 4 December 2015, NYC, New York.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

support with anything relevant to the US administration and the Congress, Özal strived to convince the American Jews that he could not trade his requests for normalisation of relations with Israel.

### **Confronting the Armenian Genocide: The ADL and Israeli-Turkish Relations**

Later in the summer of 1985, there was a more focused opportunity to review the significance of the American Jews in the improvement of relations between Jerusalem and Ankara. Examining the following document, which surveys the developments in the US and the Armenian campaign side-by-side with Israeli-Turkish relations could help to assess the value of those organisations in blocking the Armenian campaign and thus to understand their position as a powerful ethnic lobby and their view of Turkey as a critically important NATO ally to the US and Israel. This assessment is essential to understand the premise of the thesis. Harry Well, who was the director of the Jerusalem office of the ADL, wrote the following to the ADL offices in New York:

At a time when Turkish revisionists are gaining strength in denying the Nazi Holocaust, Jews are more sensitive than ever to the Armenian claims for moral and political support. [...] Turkish pressure is far less subtle, sometimes delivered in the form of warnings to Washington and occasionally through strong hints at reprisals against Israel, despite the position of neutrality mentioned by Jerusalem in respect to this controversy. There have also been reports of threats to Jews fleeing from Syria and Iran across the Turkish borders. And finally, there is the perception of Turkish Jews, valid or not, that its 20,000-member community—and its 600-year-old history of tranquillity in Turkey—may be jeopardised by the appearance of American Jews alongside the Armenians in their long feud with Turkey.<sup>15</sup>

This account summarises the core of the dilemma the American Jews were facing during the 1980s. On the one hand, denial of the Holocaust amongst Turks tended to encourage the ADL to see common cause with the Armenians and their genocide. On the other hand, the perceived danger to Jewish refugees (referring to transit immigrants)

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<sup>15</sup> Harry Well to ADL, re: Confronting the Armenian Genocide: A Dilemma for American Jewry, 15 July 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPW, 4.

in the present-day, and the risk of them not being able to flee to Turkey, was an immediate concern that perhaps carried more weight with the American Jews. Turning back to Harry Well's summary, he proceeded to give additional views regarding the Armenian dilemma and the geopolitics of the Middle East:

A powerful NATO ally, Turkey's importance to the US and for American Jewry, in particular, was enhanced with the election in neighbouring Greece of the leftist propaganda government, a regime given to anti-American, anti-Israeli and pro-PLO pronouncements. And despite its heavy dependence upon the Arab world for trade and financial aid, Turkey, a Muslim state, has resisted pressure to sever diplomatic ties with Israel. [...] Taken together with other considerations for Jewish safety mentioned above, [transit immigrants] weigh heavily as factors in the minds of some American Jewish leaders in their response to the Armenian-Turkish dispute.<sup>16</sup>

In order to understand the ideas Harry Well conveyed in his report better, I conducted an oral interview with Paul Berger, an American Jewish lawyer and a retired partner at the Arnold & Porter law firm in Washington, DC, who was a key individual in lobbying against Armenian resolutions and the USHMM during the 1980s. He summarises the point of view of the Jewish American organisations during the mid-1980s regarding pan-Jewish foreign policy:

The American Jewish community is concerned about the safety of Jewish populations everywhere in the world: South America, Argentina, the elderly in the former Soviet Union. Any threatened population immediately gets the attention of the American Jewish community and other English-speaking communities in Canada, the UK, Australia; there is always concern. That's a fundamental part of the nature of American Jewish society and the English-speaking world in the general. It's due to '*C'lal Yisrael*' (collectivity of the people of Israel); it's true. [...] Today, because of the strength of the American Jewish community, they are watching what goes on in other countries as a protective shield, just as Israel is watching for the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5.

welfare [of Jews] as a protective shield.<sup>17</sup>

Berger's oral account provides useful context to Well's report. Berger emphasises the degree to which the American Jews paid attention to the safety of Jews, not just in the Muslim world and the Middle East, but also elsewhere in the communist world, including the Soviet Union. The Turks certainly understood how the pan-Jewish factor provided the American Jews with a safety net vis à vis backing Turkey in respect to the Armenian campaign.

Placing Berger and Bialkin's oral accounts alongside Harry Well's report, it is evident that the Jewish organisations were quite aware of their critical role as a lever, not just in normalising Israeli-Turkish relations in the mid-1980s, but also in protecting the pan-Jewish interests in the Middle East. Their willingness to do this, even at the expense of recognising the Armenian genocide, recalls the observation made by Gadi, Levey and Heimann, which I mentioned in the literature review, that foreign policy driven by the aim of defending national interests could be considered a moral goal in itself, especially if this focused on the wellbeing of Jewish communities in distress. The sources above show how complexities and priorities these elites had to consider went beyond the zero-sum game of universal human rights versus politicisation of the Armenian genocide. All in all, the last two sections give a snapshot on the role of two additional factors (Özal and pan Jewish interests) apart from the Armenian claims of genocide that helped to normalise the Israeli Turkish relations.

### **Seeds for the Normalisation of Israeli-Turkish Relations (1985–1986)**

During late 1985, Israeli-Turkish relations seemed to be improving gradually. As David Sultan, former Israeli ambassador in Ankara, recalls in an oral interview:

At that point in time [1985], Turkey had begun to re-evaluate its relations with Israel because of two main factors: (1) The Jewish lobby in the US that could help Turkey to promote its interests, i.e. with respect to the Armenian genocide, and public image concerns (2) Israel's intelligence services which could provide valuable information to Turkey about the Kurdish terrorists

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<sup>17</sup> Oral interview with Paul Berger, 7 December 2015, Washington DC. *C'lal Yisrael* is a Hebrew phrase for the community/collectivity of the people of Israel.



emerging from Syria. In 1985 we [Israel] sent to Turkey one of our most talented and experienced diplomats, Yehuda Milo. He worked incredibly hard to bring about a positive turn to the relations by undertaking diplomatic initiatives with all the relevant sections of Turkish society that might help to rebuild trust, such as political parties, academia, economy and the media.<sup>18</sup>

After this short introduction to this period by Sultan, it is important to find some supporting evidence for this process in the ISA documents. Before doing so, however, I should emphasise Yehuda Milo appointment in 1985 as Israel's Chargé d'affaires in Ankara. Milo's was not just a talented diplomat as Sultan described him, but, as the subsequent chapters will reveal, an individual who sought to improve Israeli-Turkish relations almost at any cost. Milo's voice and diplomatic initiatives were dominant in shaping the Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide during the mid-1980s.

Turning to investigate ISA records underpinning normalisation, an anonymous diplomat in the Israeli embassy in Ankara reported that a Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (hereafter TNIO) "has mentioned to our representatives here [at the Israeli embassy] that Ankara has been considering upgrading their relations with Israel from second secretary to first secretary."<sup>19</sup> This indication of a move towards the normalisation of relations between the two countries was strengthened in the following few weeks. In a telegram reported to the MFA in Jerusalem, the Israeli chargé d'affaires in Ankara, Yehuda Milo noted:

In my recent conversation with Nagirat Tazal, [Turkish deputy MFA] he told me confidentially that the Turkish MFA have decided to replace the current representative in Tel Aviv with a high-ranking Turkish diplomat who is 56 years old, with extensive diplomatic experience. This step will not, however, have any public influence and will remain as declared officially - second secretary. Tazal also added that this decision had been approved by the Turkish president, Kenan Evren. [...] We hope that this positive direction will continue in the near future.<sup>20</sup>

According to Milo, Tazal noted that:

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<sup>18</sup> Oral interview with David Sultan, 20 November 2016, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>19</sup> Jerusalem, Re: The Turkish-Israeli Relations, January 1986, ISA/MFA/000A4G4

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

The ‘cover’ of the Israeli-Turkish relations does not reflect in any way the actual intimacy between the two countries. [...] I [Milo] replied that Israel feels uncomfortable with being the ‘mistress’ who is not known in public. [...] the public dimension has not yet been exposed. Hence, we will ask that you keep things discreet as you [Milo] have managed to do so far.<sup>21</sup>

In an oral interview Yitzhak Lior, the general director of the MFA Middle East Department, (1983–1987) and Israel’s ambassador to Japan (2000-2004), recalls how the change in Turkey’s attitude to Israel was viewed:

For us [Israel] 1985 was a dream coming true. One needs to acknowledge that when a Muslim nation such as Turkey approached us and changed the status of our stagnant relations, it had an enormous impact on our office [MFA]. The Turks sent one of their best diplomats at the time to Israel [Ekrem Güvendiren]. This opened up the door for normalisation of relations.<sup>22</sup>

Then Lior proposes: “Turkey’s biggest problem back then was the US. They [Turkey] were terrified of the American Congress. We used that card in our favour, no doubt about that. We made every effort to prove to the Turks what we could do for them and a big part of that was, of course, the Armenian issue”.<sup>23</sup> A document prepared by Lior himself outlines the core points in the Israeli mission to normalise relations:

In the last two years (1984–1986) we see the Turkish motivation to rebuild trust and to initiate a dialogue based on a series of mutual interests. At the top of the list is our mutual fight against regional terrorism and the [promotion of] economic trade. [...] Recently we see Turkey’s work behind the scenes as a mediator between Egypt and the Arab world. Turkey can also be a fantastic moderator between us [Israel] and the Palestinians. Such a contribution from Turkey will be highly appreciated in the US and will bring

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<sup>21</sup> Embassy in Ankara to Jerusalem, IISO, Washington DC. re: The Turkish-Israeli Relations, January 1986, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/2965, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Oral Interview with Yitzhak Lior, 26 June 2016, Ramat Gan, Israel.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

great dividends to match Turkey's ambitions in their interests with us, Israel.<sup>24</sup>

After almost a year of building positive momentum towards the upgrading of Turkish representation in Tel Aviv, on 8 September 1986 the new Turkish diplomat, Ekrem Güvendiren finally arrived at the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv. This was indeed, as Lior recalls in his oral interview, a great development from the Israeli perspective, as was the appointment of Milo, who arrived in Ankara in 1985. Together, Güvendiren's and Milo's appointments marked a milestone in Israeli-Turkish relations in the 1980s and represented the first visible sign of normalisation.<sup>25</sup> The following document summarises the first working meeting between Güvendiren and his Israeli colleagues. Lior reported the following to Milo:

Güvendiren outlined to us his overview of Israeli-Turkish relations. Specifically, he thinks that both parties should put their emphasis on pragmatism rather than formalism. [...] Güvendiren emphasised to us that discreetly he wants to promote closer ties with Israeli intelligence due to his great connections with a few high-ranking generals in the Turkish military. Therefore, he [Güvendiren] wants a military representative to be assigned to the Turkish embassy which, at first will be undercover. [...] We did not, however, respond to his query to engage in close relations with important individuals from the intelligence community, but we gave him a positive answer to meeting the Defence and Foreign Affairs committee in the Knesset, Abba Even.<sup>26</sup>

To sum up this part, it seems that Turkey had finally decided that the timing was right to begin the process of slowly normalising relations, which, unsurprisingly, was an invitation Jerusalem accepted with open arms. This was not just a result of Turkey's renewed political stability at home, but also a consequence of the emerging Armenian problem in Western Europe and, specifically, in the US.

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<sup>24</sup> Jerusalem, Re: Turkey, Bilateral Objectives, January 1986, 9801/01/ISA/MFA/0003BPU, 1

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Lior, 26 June 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Jerusalem, Re: First Meeting with the New Charge D'affaires, Güvendiren, 8 September 1986, MFA/ISA/0003BPU /9801/01, 1.

### **Turgut Özal: pro-Western Orientation**

To better understand the resolutions about the Armenian genocide that were discussed in the European Parliament and the American Congress during spring/summer 1987, one needs to step back in time to the end of 1986. Turkey, by then economically rehabilitated, was seeking to continue its gradual economic improvement. To achieve this goal, however, Turkey needed to expand more into Western markets. Özal, therefore, had to tackle the issues that repeatedly came between Turkey and its allies during the Cold War, namely the Cyprus and Kurdish questions and, central to this thesis, Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide. The scholarship on Turgut Özal's political and economic legacies argues that Özal did not understand that the pro-Western and neo-liberal economy should be implemented side by side with profound policy changes to Turkey's human rights regime and the associated institutional reforms needed to implement a neo-liberal economy. Namely, Turkey's allies expected to see better treatment of Turkey's ethnic minorities, acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide and the development of a Western democracy emphasising checks and balances.<sup>27</sup>

After this short historical background, it is necessary to go back to the premise of this chapter to examine the Israeli MFA perspective on this shift in Turkish policy. The analysis above reveals that Özal sought to focus on solving only one out of Turkey's set of problems of the 1980s (financial), without reevaluating Turkey's approach to its dark past and problematic present (the Armenian genocide and the Kurdish question, respectively), and that this created a need for aid from the Israeli MFA, supplemented by the lobbying efforts of Turkish and American Jews. Özal's approach also created a need for Turkey to improve Israeli-Turkish relations in order to get better access to the American Congress and the Reagan administration so as to secure further financial aid from the Americans.

### **Turkey's First Application to the EEC (December 1986)**

As part of the attempt to develop closer economic ties with Western countries, late in 1986, Özal was in the process of putting forward Turkey's first application to join the EEC. Meanwhile, the Israeli diplomats in Ankara were watching closely how Özal's

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<sup>27</sup> Öniş, "Turgut Özal", 114.

journey to meet European governments went, identifying whether they could provide precious assistance. In addition, the MFA sought to re-evaluate what to expect from Özal's European tour and how this could be leveraged into improving Israeli-Turkish relations. As shown further in this chapter, the Armenian issue was surely an integral part of this assessment. Yehuda Milo, Israel's charge d'affaires in Ankara (1985–1989), wrote a two-page report for Jerusalem providing a background assessment of the Turkish application to join the EEC. Milo noted that according to the 'Association Agreement' signed in 1963, it is agreed between Turkey and EEC that as of 1 December 1986, Turkey could file a formal application to the EEC; subsequently, singling out a 'Free Circulation Agreement' between the parties granting the free circulation of Turkish workers among the member countries' borders.<sup>28</sup> Milo further explained to Jerusalem:

So far, the EEC has shown discomfort about both the agreements above and wishes to reject the idea altogether. Gurin Morgen, the EEC representative in Ankara sent a letter to the Turkish diplomat Ali Bozer explaining that the European council would reassess these agreements during the forthcoming meeting of the foreign ministers of the EEC council. I [Milo] have met with Morgen myself, and unfortunately did not learn anything new; the deep concerns by the Europeans are not just about flooding the European labour market with 'Anatolian farmers', but also about their free circulation amongst European countries and the ability to move freely within the European countries, which highlight security issues. If Turkey would indeed apply to join the EEC after all, it will receive a very unpleasant rejection. All the above contributes to the emerging Turkish frustration and disappointment with the EEC. The only solution to the problem is financial compensation. However, these frustrations can be noticed at all levels of the Turkish MFA regarding the indications that the EEC is planning to violate the agreements signed years ago and thus to distance Turkey from the EEC.<sup>29</sup>

Although Milo does not say so explicitly in his account, he is trying to evaluate whether, and, if so, how the negative attitude of the EEC regarding Turkey's candidacy might

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<sup>28</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem and Brussel, re: Turkey – EEC, 3 December 1986, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/1567, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2.

affect Özal's pro-Western orientation. The document reveals how Milo, as a representative of Israel, was doing anything he possibly could to gain further leverage by investigating whether Turkey has other unknown problems with the EEC. By reporting to Jerusalem that "there were no surprises" Milo is telling us that he was trying to discover something that was unknown which might be useful as leverage with Ankara.

The reply from Jerusalem was, not surprisingly, pro-Turkish. The deputy director and Israeli diplomat, Yitzhak Lior, accepted Milo's point of view and noted that Turkey's application to the EEC was not just a sensitive issue now for the Europeans, but also an opportunity for MFA to gain leverage with the Turks.<sup>30</sup> Lior wrote "just because this is an awkward moment for the Turks, if there is anything we can help them with now, even any small gesture from us could be acknowledged at Ankara. To make sure we do not get into trouble with anyone, we still will need to consider any possible gesture to the smallest details, but please do not hesitate to share any idea you might have about this".<sup>31</sup>

All in all, it seems that Milo and Lior understood that the Turks were facing some difficulties with their EEC application and that even Özal's pro-Western orientation would not be sufficient with that. Instead, Milo and Lior evaluated that, although this was an embarrassing moment for the Turks, the Israeli MFA could turn it to their advantage by providing the Turks with help in both Washington and Brussels.

### **The Question of Turkey's Membership of the EEC: A View from Brussels and Jerusalem (1986–1987)**

The stagnant Turkey-EEC relations were a result of the indifferent attitude of Western European countries to Turkey, which questioned why Turkey should become a member of the EEC. The Israeli diplomats followed developments closely for every nugget of information. A report written by Binyamin Oron, Israel's second secretary to the EEC (1985–1989) delivered a fresh update from Brussels regarding the European views on the Turkish-EEC crisis. Oron wrote:

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<sup>30</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara and Istanbul, re: Turkey – EEC, 5 December 1986, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/467.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Regarding the Turkish application to EEC, the European experts here [Brussels] have more questions than answers. All in all, they are seriously questioning how really 'European' Turkey is, and what, if at all, Turkey can contribute to the integration of Europe. Furthermore, the European Parliament has a problem in principle with Turkey's policy limiting the freedom of mobility on its soil, while Turkish immigrants will move freely within the EEC zone. Also, the question of Greek-Turkish relations is out there, and the geopolitical questions emerging from the possible integration of Turkey into the EEC, and thus the possible expansion of the EEC's borders towards the USSR, Syria and Iraq. At this stage, everyone here admits they could not establish a coherent picture, which can possibly address all the strategic, political and economic aspects of the Turkish problem.<sup>32</sup>

Oron's report relates some of the European concerns about the geopolitical/economic implications of Turkey's possible membership of the EEC. The question of the Armenian genocide, however, is not stated explicitly here as a concern among the Europeans (yet). To cast more light on Turkish-EEC relations at this point, in an oral interview with Avi Primor, Israel's ambassador to the EEC (1987–1993), he recalls the behind-the-scenes arguments at the EEC and thus the first failed attempts of Turkey to integrate into the EEC:

The Europeans never really wanted to accept Turkey into the EU/EEC. That said, it does not imply that some countries were not accepted under pressure who were in fact in a similar condition to Turkey. For example, when Helmut Kohl was the first Chancellor of the newly reunited Germany (1990–1998), he heavily pressured the EEC to accept the Eastern European countries, even though they did not follow up with the right procedures to become 'real democracies'. Or in other words, they were not 'real democracies' just like Turkey is not one. The practical test to be integrated to the now EU (or then the EEC), is whether these countries had a real democratic parliament, or not.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Brussels to Jerusalem and Ankara, re: Turkish –EEC relations, 2 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/514, 3 and 7.

<sup>33</sup> Oral interview with Avi Primor via Skype, 12 February 2018.

The oral account by Primor ties in with Oron's report regarding the EEC's concerns about the Turkish application. Side by side with Turkey's application to the EEC in December 1986, it should be mentioned here that, in February 1987, the first Armenian resolution bill was drafted in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, being subsequently approved by the full parliament in June 1987. This resolution is examined in depth in chapter six of this thesis, where it is argued that its intention was not just to do justice by the Armenians, but also to examine Turkey's reaction to the bill and to help Turkey to meet the basic standards to qualify for membership in the EEC.

Contextualising Primor's and Oron's accounts in light of the Armenian genocide resolution on June 1987, therefore, one question should be addressed: what was the specific weight given when considering Turkey's attempt to join the EEC to the Turkish denial of human rights to its minorities? One possible answer that should be considered here, given all of Turkey's problems mentioned above, is that the Armenian genocide resolution in the European Parliament was actually an attempt to help the Turks to acknowledge their dark past. Arguably, if Turkey had acceded to the resolution, some EEC countries that would otherwise oppose Turkey, could see this as a positive sign that Turkey was moving in the right direction: i.e. as a first Turkish step to becoming a 'real democracy', accepting the Ottomans' responsibility for the perpetration of the Armenian genocide. The European Parliament might have thought that a Turkish acknowledgement of some responsibility for the Armenian genocide would have encouraged Ankara to also reconsider its contemporary treatment of other minorities, such as the Kurds. Such a possible acknowledgement could have made Turkey's application more appropriate given a few more conditions or other reforms in the Turkish economy and in respect to minority rights. On the other hand, perhaps, given the unsurprising rage expressed by Turkey about the Armenian genocide resolution, it should instead be seen as the last punch under the belt to demonstrate how Turkey was not really aligned with the values of the Western European countries.

Israel's MFA, therefore, identified three components as crucial to rebuilding and normalising relations with Turkey: (1) the economic factors; i.e. after its disappointment from the Arab world, and thus Turkey's need for financial aid from the Americans through the DECA pact was about to expire by December 1985. (2) Turkey's Public Relations (PR) issues; i.e. its negative reputation in the US with respect to the treatment of its ethnic minorities, and thereby (3) most importantly, the Armenian



campaign for genocide recognition as crucial within the rehabilitation of the bilateral relations. All of the above unfolded into the substantial improvement in bilateral relations in the run-up to 1986.

### **The Israeli Pro-Turkish Faction**

In an oral interview Benyamin Oron recounts that during late 1986 he received a phone call from Milo asking him to assist the Turks on the EEC front at Strasbourg:

It is standard to request help from Israeli peers serving in other countries, but, a group of Israeli diplomats serving in Turkey during these years, or from the Middle Eastern department [in Jerusalem] were pro-Turkish, and they requested and pressured us about the Armenian issue and Turkey far beyond the standard peer-to-peer help. i.e. these diplomats were all extremely pro-Turkish because they honestly believed that Israel's relations with Turkey were Israel's highest diplomatic priority at that time.<sup>34</sup>

Oron noted that there is an alternative reading of the Armenian factor. Without naming them explicitly, Oron refers to Milo, Lior and others who seemed to be highly committed to the normalisation with Turkey. As the Armenians moved towards "more constructive memorial work" in 1984, this internal faction became more visible in MFA documents which will be studied more fully in chapter six. As Reoven Merhav, who was the Director General of the Israeli MFA between 1988–1991, recalls in an oral interview:

During the late 1970s and the Iranian revolution, Yael Vered was the Middle East department general director. She was a short lady, who was blocking anyone with her light body that even thought of helping the Armenians in terms of recognition. She was extremely anxious about anything that had to do with the Armenians which might upset the Turks.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Oral interview with Benyamin Oron, 29 January 2018, Jerusalem, Israel. Oron refers here to Alon Liel, Yehuda Milo, Yakov Hadas-Handelsman, Yitzhak Lior, Yehoyada Haim and above all of them Abraham Tamir, (MFA director, 1986–1990). Yehuda Milo passed away in 2003 and Abraham Tamir in 2010, and therefore could not be interviewed for this thesis. Yakov Hadas-Handelsman refused to be interviewed although several contacts were made with him during 2015 and 2017 by emails and via other diplomats I have interviewed. Yehoyada Haim, Yitzhak Lior and Alon Liel agreed to be interviewed.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, Merhav, 23 July 2017.

Merhav's oral account and his gendered metaphor allow us to explore the internal politics of the Israeli MFA. Along with Oron's account above, Merhav's oral account cast new light that helps us to estimate the particular weight of a specific group of Israeli diplomats—an extremely pro-Turkish faction—in executing the Israeli policy on the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. As it seems, it was not just an impersonal process involving top-down decisions between rival groups of diplomats, but also a bottom-up process involving the personal views of the officials, especially when most of them were second-generation Holocaust survivors.

This phrase 'pro-Turkish faction' does not imply that there was an anti-Turkish faction, as such, in that arguably all Israeli diplomats during this period broadly agreed that relations with Turkey were important to Israel; rather it highlights that there was a faction that saw trading the contested memories of the Armenian genocide as being critical to restoring relations with Turkey, whereas others felt that there could be other routes to that end. The differences in reading the Armenian component between the two groups is relevant mainly to the third part of the thesis since the concerns of this faction manifests in key moments during this period.

Further reflecting on the pro-Turkish faction in the MFA in those years, Alon Liel (who was affiliated to that group of diplomats), cast light in an oral interview about the regional priorities. Liel recounts that, back in the mid-1980s, the Israeli MFA faced a fundamental question:

who was more important in the 'new Middle East'? Egypt or Turkey? The Israeli MFA understood that the Israeli-Egyptian alliance was important but was not yet blooming. In this context, normalisation with Turkey was the best thing that could happen to Israel. The Israeli MFA sought to have both Turkey and Egypt as Israel's Middle Eastern allies. To this end, the MFA was extremely focused on making absolutely sure that no opportunities were missed in respect to Turkey.<sup>36</sup>

Liel's assessment about 'the common sense' of courting Turkey in the mid-late 1980s sounds reasonable if one considers the changing alliances in the Middle East at that time, with Israel having lost two important supports in the Muslim world: Teheran (1979) and Ankara (1980), leading to Israel's isolation in the Middle East, excluding Egypt and the

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<sup>36</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

peace accord (1979).

In another oral account Yehoyada Haim, who had a higher rank than Liel in Israel's MFA (he was Director of the Middle East department during the 1980s), confirms that the Turkish context was extremely important to Israel's reconstruction of its Middle East grand strategy in the mid/late 1980s. Haim noted that "back then we strived to slowly approach the Palestinians. So, having both Turkey and Egypt on board was very important for this breakthrough".<sup>37</sup> Investigating this strategy further uncovers the degree to which the personal views of the Directors of the MFA during the mid-1980s could have made a difference. Another individual who was part of that group, Yitzhak Lior, recalls in an oral interview:

Abraham (Abrasha) Tamir was a high-ranking Israeli military general; therefore, as MFA director, Abrasha was obsessed with establishing a military cooperation with the Turkish army which, by the late 1980s, was not even something we thought to be possible. Tamir wished to demonstrate to our superiors his unique value as MFA director, and that he was doing something that no one else had done before him. Abrasha was not afraid of anything and did not have any problems with conscience or morality. Sometimes, he used brutal tactics to get what he wanted, and had a 'my way or the highway' approach. Everyone knew who he was.<sup>38</sup>

Although one needs to assess the above accounts carefully and suspiciously as with any other sources, while Liel and Haim highlight what the strategy was, Lior tried to pinpoint the hierarchy as the main motive, thus to 'incriminate' Tamir as the main source of the pro-Turkish faction (and thus the anti-Armenian) trend within the MFA during the period in question. Even if this is true, however, and although there was surely a clear hierarchy in the MFA, when one closely examines the correspondence between Lior and Milo above, it seems fair to argue that these two were not so naive or just 'following orders', but also had their own contribution to the pro-Turkish—and thus anti-Armenian—spirit in the MFA. This is an important angle which adds depth to the analysis of the central research question of the thesis and is useful in terms of examining the unfolding events

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<sup>37</sup> Interview, Haim, 28 January 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Lior, 29 June 2016. Abrasha Tamir served in the IDF as '*Aluf*' or '*Rav Aluf*' which literally means a 'champion' in Hebrew. The parallel rank is 'admiral' in other countries' defence forces.

in this chapter. In this context of the emergence of new ‘Armenian genocide’ related problems, more had to be done to help the Turks in order to allow them to justify the normalisation of the Israeli-Turkish relations. The Israeli assistance in combatting the Armenian genocide resolutions was therefore a means to an end.

### **Normalisation and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (1987–1988)**

Further, in 1987, after Güvendiren had been working as Turkey’s Chargé d'affaires in Tel Aviv for almost a year, he confidently supported a gradual improvement in the relations with Israel. In a document sent from the Chargé d'affaires Yehuda Milo in Ankara to Yitzhak Lior in MFA Jerusalem, the former reported that Israel should be increasing its activity to match its promises given to Güvendiren:

He [Güvendiren] said the Turkish delegation in Washington DC was under the impression that no progress has been made about the Armenian-related issues, and they [the Turks] begin to question the credibility of Israel’s MFA on this matter. [...] Of course, I dismissed his [Güvendiren] claims by saying that the ‘Armenian task’ is not so simple, and the issues are very sensitive for us... [...] Güvendiren said that the PR Israel/Jewish efforts should be made openly and not behind the scenes. The discussion with Güvendiren did not go much further about the Armenian issue, because we would like to keep him out of it, otherwise every time we will meet Güvendiren this topic can become the core and will interrupt any other achievement and progress we have been making.<sup>39</sup>

Scholars have yet really to explore the Turkish expectations in respect to Israel’s assistance in limiting reference to the Armenian genocide, both locally and internationally, once normalisation of the relations actually took place in 1986–1988. From the above MFA record, however, it is clear that the Armenian-related issues were close to being the dominant factor in Israeli-Turkish relations during that period.

From December 1987 into 1988 the first Palestinian resistance (the First Palestinian Intifada) had emerged, aimed against the Israeli occupation in the West Bank. After the enactment of the Jerusalem Law in July 1980, and set against the normalisation process,

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<sup>39</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, Re: Güvendiren, 26 August 1987, MFA/ISA/0003BPU, 1–2.

Israeli diplomats were quite concerned about a renewed rupture with Turkey. Milo reported to Jerusalem about a meeting he held in Ankara with the Turkish deputy Foreign Minister, after the latter invited Milo to discuss the developments in Gaza. Milo wrote:

The deputy foreign minister had noted that the Turkish government has been concerned about the latest developments which cost the lives of people and property. The Turks were very concerned, as were the rest of the Western world and the international community, by the human rights violations Israel has been committing. Furthermore, the behaviour of IDF combatants at the Al-Aqsa Mosque has been hurting the feelings of people worldwide. [...] That said, the Turks also acknowledge that the Israelis are facing some difficulties of their own thus it would be better to see both parties reaching a non-violent agreement.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the irony of the Turks inviting Milo to discuss Israeli policies against the Palestinians and human rights violations while they suppressed Turkey's own dark past and the abuse of human rights of its ethnic minorities in the present, it seems that the Turkish initiative was made more as a formal diplomatic exchange that would be noted by the press but would not change the two countries' relations. In essence, the Turks took a more balanced approach to this conflict than in 1980. Given the need for the Israeli/Jewish ability to influence US policy on the Armenian genocide this makes sense and paved the way for the gradual normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations deep into the early years of the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that set against the backdrop of Turkey's economic improvement, political stability and the emerging international pressure with respect to an awakening of the memory of the Armenian genocide, between 1983 and 1988 Ankara initiated a gradual normalisation of relations with Jerusalem. The aim was that Israel and Jewish American organisations could help to improve Turkey's image in the US, especially so as to mitigate the possibility of the Armenian genocide being acknowledged or represented in American political and cultural fora. This chapter has

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<sup>40</sup>Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Turkey and the Events Occupied Territories, 22 January 1988, MFA/ISA/0003BPU/14123, 1–2.

framed the historical timeline that the third part of the thesis is focused on. It has examined specific historical circumstances and factors, such as Özal's impact on Turkey's foreign policy, and American Jewish organisations acting as a backchannel to improve Israeli-Turkish relations, and how these ultimately drove Israel's MFA to do what it could to put serious obstacles in the way of the international campaign for recognition of the Armenian genocide.

Four important factors that are pivotal for the argument of the thesis should be highlighted from this chapter: firstly, while the military coup of 1980 stabilised the crumbling relations, Özal's coming to power in November 1983 had advanced the pro-Western orientation which helped to tilt the relations with Israel towards a possible normalisation. More precisely, Özal's aim to renew Turkey's foreign policy with the US and Western Europe helped to normalise the relations with Jerusalem, because of the perceived Israeli ability to influence the policies of the US administration, and more generally the American political and cultural arena. This was a fruitful development for the Israelis, not least because the Jewish organisations were persuaded to align with the need to demand from Özal an immediate normalisation with Israel during 1984–1985. The second factor was the fact that the Jewish organisations had a sober realisation of Turkey's role in the Middle East and the Western alliance. This is not something one can disregard, because the Jewish organisations, specifically the ADL, also had to think about their local political alliances and thus consider the role the Armenian ethnic lobby was playing as a powerful grouping in the US political arena. Within this context, the American Jews' overview of the Middle East as a region and of Turkey's role in securing an escape route for Iranian and Syrian Jews should also be recalled. As noted in this chapter, the Jewish organisations prioritised the Jewish component of 'Klal Israel' during their engagements with Özal rather than aligning with the Armenians.

Alongside these, two other factors are critical to understanding how this chapter contributes to the premise of the third part of the thesis. Third, the presence of an Israeli MFA pro-Turkish faction which sought to normalise the relations with Ankara at all costs. The enthusiasm of Vered, Milo, Lior and others for better ties with Turkey needs to be considered when the Armenian-related issues come to the centre of attention in the fifth and six chapters. Fourth, and related to the previous points, is a reflection on Turkey's failed application to the EEC, which was an important background to the 1987 decision by the European Parliament to acknowledge the Armenian genocide, as well as the subsequent decision by the US Congress to reject a parallel bill.

Part two of the thesis, which consists of the two preliminary chapters on Israeli-Turkish relations, has reviewed the most critical key events and factors in the period in question. These two chapters provide a useful context to the other two parts of the thesis which focus much more on the Armenian campaign and how it was viewed from Jerusalem, Ankara and Washington. These two chapters show that context and timing matter and that they shaped in many ways the policy of Israeli diplomats in respect to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. To conclude, this section of the thesis has demonstrated how Israeli diplomats, through attempts to influence US foreign policy in the Middle East, were able to convince the Turks that normalising relation with Jerusalem was a practical step for Ankara. Supplemented with Özal's pro-Western orientation, the above provides us with an important historical context to understand the Armenian campaign for recognition of the 1915 genocide.

**PART III:**  
**THE CONTESTED MEMORIES OF THE ARMENIAN  
GENOCIDE AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE MIDDLE  
EAST**



# Chapter 5

## Leveraging ASALA as a Means to a Rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish Relations (1979–1987)

### Introduction

As shown in the first section of the thesis, during the late 1970s and early 1980s Turkey was suffering from social and political anarchy that led ultimately to the 1980 military coup.<sup>1</sup> As well as the aim of preventing a fundamentalist coup in Turkey, one of the most critical issues facing the Turkish military was terrorism, both within Turkish society, perpetrated by groups of the far left, among them the Kurds, and simultaneously abroad by Armenian terrorists. With respect to the latter, the international Armenian campaign for recognition of the 1915 genocide launched in the mid-1970s with assassinations of Turkish diplomats in Western countries. This was done not only to take revenge on the Turks for their denial of the 1915 genocide and for Western bloc allies who aligned themselves with the Turkish narrative, but also to raise international awareness of the forgotten genocide.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the Armenian terrorists focused their efforts and aspirations on three objectives: firstly, vengeance on the Turkish Republic because of the 1915 genocide. Subsequently, the second objective was to force the present Turkish Republic to recognise the genocide committed by the Young Turks: thereby, thirdly, forcing the Turks into making reparations by returning the land taken from the Armenian victims.<sup>3</sup> As both Dixon and Gürpınar note, however, the military regime and the Turkish bureaucratic elites officialised the denial with an institutional innovation: the establishment of the ‘Directorate General of Intelligence and Research’ (a department in the Turkish MFA) whose task was to marshal evidence to support the Turkish narrative of the ‘Armenian question’.<sup>4</sup>

Given that the primary objectives of the military regime in 1980 were to stabilise the political and social chaos and to fight terrorism, this chapter explores how

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<sup>1</sup> Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 3rd Edition (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 278–337.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *Armenia*, 380.

<sup>3</sup> For more on this see Wilkinson, “Armenian”; Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism*; Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

<sup>4</sup> Dixon, “Defending the Nation?,” 471; Gürpınar, “The Manufacturing of Denial,” 224–25.

these circumstances drove the Israeli diplomats to leverage the Armenian terrorism campaign into foreign policy and counter-terrorism ends. Specifically, I argue that Israel's desire to repair its relations with Turkey between 1980 and 1985 drove Israeli diplomats to characterise ASALA terrorist activity as Eastern bloc-sponsored terrorism against the Western bloc in the Middle East. The MFA crafted this strategy seeking to help Israel on two fronts: first, in justifying the counter-terrorism battle Israel undertook against Palestinian terrorism; and second, in helping to restore Israeli-Turkish relations. It should be noted, however, that although the Israelis based their arguments on empirical evidence collected by their intelligence institutions, as parts of this chapter show, these connections were overplayed in order to help the above diplomatic agenda. Hence, Israeli diplomats used Armenian terrorism, and its apparent affiliation with a similar brand of Palestinian and Soviet left-wing terrorism, as a diplomatic tool to support their policy objectives. The Armenian-Palestinian shared activity was not only priceless in restoring Israeli-Turkish relations, but also in justifying Israel's battle against Palestinian organisations in the region and the armed conflict which was launched by Israel in southern Lebanon in 1982. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Israeli diplomats tried various methods to collect evidence to back up this premise.

As the previous two chapters have also shown, alongside the need for the two countries to cooperate against Soviet-affiliated terrorist organisations, Israeli diplomats used the tripartite Israeli-Turkish-United States relationship, especially the argument for the need to maintain American influence in the Middle East in the context of the renewed East-West tensions of the early 1980s, as a reason for Turkey to restore relations. This strategy was aimed at keeping the Turks as a vibrant Cold War ally essential for the balance of power in the Middle East.

The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part examines the late 1970s and early 1980s, when ASALA terrorist activity was at its peak. During this period, Israeli diplomats, specifically the pro-Turkish faction, made some extraordinary efforts to convince the Turks that Armenian terrorism, specifically ASALA, was being trained and financed by Palestinian terrorist groups, and that both were affiliated with the Soviet Union. The last part shows how, during 1985–1987, set against the gradual process of normalisation of relations between Ankara and Jerusalem, and the emerging

Armenian campaign in western Europe and the US, Israel and Turkey fostered a mutual forum against Middle Eastern terrorism.

### **Anti-Western Armenian Terrorism: ASALA's Targeting of Turkish Diplomats (1973–1985)**

Given that ASALA assassinations were undertaken in an effort to bring the forgotten 1915 genocide to the world's attention, most of the Armenian diaspora treated them as a justifiable use of violence.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it should be emphasised that Israel, Turkey, US and other Western countries labelled ASALA as a terrorist organisation not just for their own national security and diplomatic interests, but also because of the attempts to injure and even kill innocent bystanders who had nothing to do with Armenian allegations of genocide or Turkish denial. It is essential, therefore, to define terrorism, and also to understand how the Israelis and Turks defined terrorism in the 1980s. Coming to grips with terrorism is an elusive mission, since forms of terrorism are very broad, and the term is used frequently in public discourse and modern life. Yet, it is possible to identify some basic shared foundations. For instance, the first usage was in the French revolution (1789–1794), and thus terrorism relates to political change which drives the perpetrators to act violently to achieve their goals.<sup>6</sup> This fundamental understanding is evident in the views expressed in the context of Israeli-Turkish relations, specifically in ISA documents between Ankara and Jerusalem which define Armenian terrorism as a means to achieve political change. Namely, the drive of the Armenians in perpetrating violence against Turkey's diplomats was supplied by political objectives (i.e. for genocide recognition and territorial claims).

The primary focus of this chapter is on ASALA rather than on JCAG. In fact,

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the excellent short discussion on how the Armenian diaspora treated the terrorists as part of the Armenian mainstream and as heroes rather than as radical and marginal terrorists; see Weitz, "Memory in the Shadows of Genocide", 98. [in Hebrew]. According to Razmik Panossian, some of the violence against the Turkish diplomats was aimed at shaking "Armenians out of their torpid state, and to put the Armenian cause (Genocide recognition and lost lands) back on the agenda of world politics". Panossian, *The Armenians From Kings and Priest*, 310;

<sup>6</sup> See Oxford English Dictionary, which refers to terrorist activity as needing to be perpetrated systematically and carried out by a political party – *The Oxford English Dictionary, Compact Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3,268. For a broad discussion on definitions of terrorism see Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 1–42. Hoffman also proposes that the broadest accepted contemporary application of the term terrorism is its political usage and to gain power.

as this chapter shows, JCAG activity is not addressed at all in the reflections of the Israeli diplomats; in the ISA documents only ASALA is referred to in the context of Armenian terrorism. Arguably, there are two main reasons for this focus among the Israeli diplomats: in contrast to JCAG, ASALA was targeting innocent bystanders and non-Turkish victims in their terrorist attacks, a possible threat to Israelis and Jews worldwide; besides, as noted in the work by Tomas de Waal, the fact that ASALA was aligned with the Soviet Bloc in the Cold War and operating against Western countries drove the Western countries' focus on ASALA rather than JCAG.<sup>7</sup> For example, on 31 July 1980, after carrying out the killing of Galip Ozmen, an attaché at the Turkish embassy in Athens, an official ASALA statement noted that the group had taken “another step in our struggle against the Turkish regime, reactionary Turkish forces, NATO, American imperialism and the reactionary Armenian forces”.<sup>8</sup> No doubt, this statement was directed clearly towards Turkey and the US, but also to the other Western bloc countries as well as NATO.

To explore these issues, I interviewed Carmi Gillon, an expert on terrorism and counter-terrorism who served in various positions in the Israeli diplomatic and intelligence landscape, such as the Director of IGSS (1995–1996) and later as Israel's ambassador to Denmark (2001–2003). Gillon gave a comparative account of terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s and situated the Armenian phenomenon within this global map:

In 1972, after the terrorist attack against the Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympic games, the phrase the ‘theatre of terror’ was coined; although in the 1970s there was no Internet, what happened in Munich was the focus of the television and radio who broadcast the drama in real time and the Palestinians acknowledged that very well. As a terrorist organisation, using international forums was the best possible method to convey your political/ideological message. We also need to remember that back in the 1970s most of the terrorist organisations were affiliated with the Soviets and their ideological communist premise. So, to give you a

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<sup>7</sup> de Waal, *Great Catastrophe*, 154.

<sup>8</sup> “Armenian Secret Army Claims Responsibility for Athens Deaths,” *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 48: 4, 9 August, 1980.

comparative overview, we had the Japanese Red Army, the Red Brigades in Italy, the Baader-Meinhof Group in West Germany, Palestinian organisations, and lastly the Armenians; the Armenians were the last who learned that to get international attention they needed to conduct their terrorist attacks against Turkish targets abroad.<sup>9</sup>

Gillon's oral account takes us back to a period when international terrorism was taking its first steps as an instrument to convey messages in a bipolar world. Indeed, the role of the media was crucial here, and perhaps more powerful because there were fewer media outlets, and, of course, no social media. Thus, when Gillon mentions the 'theatre of terror' he highlights the substantial impact of terrorism on the attention of the Western world. Choosing this strategy would therefore seem, in the eyes of the Armenian diaspora of the 1970s, a potentially successful way of conveying a message; violence was, crucially, a method that had demonstrated relative success for other suppressed minorities. Perhaps, the Irish Republican Army (hereafter IRA) and the Basque nationalist movement, *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (hereafter ETA) are more recent examples for suppressed minorities who chose to perpetrate violence with the aim of achieving political change and nationalist aspirations.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the Armenian decision to use terrorism to bring the forgotten genocide of 1915 to the world's attention can be rationalised. Nonetheless, one needs to consider how the authorities, specifically governments, approached terrorism, especially Middle Eastern terrorism since this will help explain why and how the Israelis were able to leverage Armenian terrorism as a diplomatic instrument when courting the Turkish military elite.

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<sup>9</sup> Oral Interview with Carmi Gillon, 8 January 2016, Mevaseret Zion, Israel.

<sup>10</sup> See for example on the IRA: Kacper Rekawek, *Irish Republican Terrorism and Politics : A Comparative Study of the Official and the Provisional IRA* (New York : Routledge, 2011); and for ETA see for example: Julen Zabalo Bilbao and Onintza Odriozola Irizar, "The Importance of Historical Context: A New Discourse on the Nation in Basque Nationalism?," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 23, no. 2 (2017): 134–54, to mention a few.

### **Palestinian Terrorism Emerging from Lebanon (1978–1980)**

Israel obviously suffered from Palestinian terrorism; mainly in the form of radical left-wing movements that did not engage with the non-violent path the Palestine Liberation Organisation (hereafter PLO) set out on in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>11</sup> The radical Palestinian terrorist organisations fitted into the basic definition of terrorism, as did ASALA, in that each aimed to achieve political goals through the use of violence. Subsequently, towards the late 1970s, the PLO split into radical leftist moments, such as George Habash's PFLP, Black September and Abu Nidal, whose key agenda was to achieve Palestinian nationalist goals by perpetrating violence against Israeli targets, based on the notion of national armed struggle.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Lebanon was an essential hub in the Middle East concerning terrorism. The roots of this situation lay in the 1948 war, when Palestinian refugees were placed in a camp in Lebanon. Despite the multi-ethnic and pro-Western orientation of Lebanon, its substantial Muslim population meant that the country supported the Pan-Arab aspirations in the fight against Israel. The Palestinian influence in southern Lebanon became stronger after the 1967 war when another wave of refugees arrived, mainly from Jordan. The Arab defeat in the 1967 six-day war triggered a wave of international terrorism by Palestinian resistance groups.<sup>13</sup>

In an oral interview with Daniel Mokady, Israel's ambassador to Chile (1989–1993), and the MFA director of the Policy Research Institute, he asserts that, once established in southern Lebanon, the Palestinians were looking for any kind of cooperation, and the Armenians were there and very much open to helping the Palestinians and being helped by them. Both Armenian and Palestinian terror organisations [ASALA and Abu Nidal and the Popular Front for the Liberation of

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<sup>11</sup> The PLO was not a unitary actor, but a conglomerate of Palestinian organisations formed initially at the behest of Egypt and taken over by Fatah in 1969, leading eventually to support for a peace process with the backing of the Western Bloc for a two-state solution with Israel. For an excellent analysis of the phases of Palestinian nationalism during 1948–2005, see Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 25–48, (especially 30–2).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>13</sup> See for example: Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975–92* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), VIII; John Bulloch, *The Making of a War: The Middle East from 1967 to 1973* (London: Longman, 1974); Kamal S. Salibi, *Cross Roads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958–1976* (New York: Caravan Books, 1976).

Palestine] were close ideologically and geographically, and Lebanon's government did not resist this terrorism activity.<sup>14</sup>

Mokady's account helps to isolate the geopolitical factor as a catalyst for terrorism in the Middle East in the 1970s. Armenian terrorism was quite limited in its capacity and activity, therefore this account is mainly useful when one comes to trace what drew the attention of the Israeli MFA to the Armenians as a terrorist group in the first place. To be sure, the Palestinians with their multiple, well-funded and established organisations, had cooperated with similar groups in other areas of the globe, but ultimately the Israelis' focus was the Middle Eastern terror map and Lebanon as the harbour of that activity. With this in mind, the terrorist organisations which were close ideologically and geographically to the Palestinians, such as the Armenians, received negative attention from Jerusalem.

### **The Armenian Genocide: Between Commemoration and Terror (1980–1982)**

#### *Protecting Turkish Diplomats in Tel Aviv, 24 April 1980*

Before the annual commemoration of the Armenian genocide on 24 April 1980, Israeli authorities, specifically the Israeli security forces, but also the MFA, secured Turkish diplomats against a possible attack on the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv, the Consulate in Jerusalem and the diplomats' residencies. In a declassified document signed by the intelligence department of the Israeli police, it was stated:

In previous years the Armenians have asked to demonstrate against the Turkish embassy to commemorate the 'Armenian Holocaust' on the 24 April. However, every year including 1980, their request has been declined. Recently, there have been also reports on assassinations of Turkish diplomats or terrorist attacks against Turkish targets abroad; the responsibility for these attacks has been undertaken by 'an Armenian retaliation organisation'. The Turks have drawn to our attention that lately a Turkish diplomat has been assassinated in Switzerland and have applied

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<sup>14</sup> Mokady, 30 October 2016.

for our tight security during those sensitive dates. Therefore, make sure that the Turkish diplomats and delegation members listed below will have close security during this sensitive period.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the phrasing used in the document which labels the Armenian genocide as a ‘Holocaust’, or the tight security the Israeli Police Director David Chen offers to the Turks, it is evident that at that point in time Israeli authorities did not want to take any chances, in the context of the crumbling Israeli-Turkish relations, that a Turkish diplomat might be assassinated on Israeli soil by an Armenian terrorist. This would undoubtedly have been a major scandal for Israel that could easily have provoked a further deterioration in relations between Ankara and Jerusalem. The document tells us that, from the Israeli authorities’ point of view, the Armenians had already been flagged as terrorists, especially in the context of the 24 April international day of remembrance. The above had served to bring mainly negative attention to the Armenians rather than the sympathy they had hoped for.

#### *24 April 1980 International Day of Remembrance in Western Europe and US*

During the days after 24 April 1980, the Israeli MFA were watching closely whether there had been demonstrations, or even violence, by the local Armenian diaspora around Western capitals to commemorate the 1915 Armenian genocide.<sup>16</sup> It was noted that Vienna, London, Stockholm and Rome reported that there were no special encounters between the local Armenian community and the authorities and the media did not broadcast any special programmes on the Armenian genocide of any kind.<sup>17</sup> The Israeli ambassador in Rome also noted that although there was not even one public engagement on the Armenian genocide, still in private meetings he conducted with local Italian politicians, “they noted that if someone needs to publicly demonstrate it is the Italians

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<sup>15</sup> Tel Aviv Police Intelligence Department to MFA Jerusalem and Ankara, re: The International Commemoration Day of the Armenian Holocaust, 8 April 1980, ISA/MFA/25089/0514/0002SE1, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Jerusalem to Paris, Rome, Stockholm, Vienna, Athens and Washington, re: The International Commemoration Day of the Armenian Holocaust, 27 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/1648,

<sup>17</sup> London to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 28 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/7115; Vienna to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 30 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/7801; Stockholm to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 29 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/7451.



against the Armenians and their notorious terrorist attacks.<sup>18</sup> Also, the Israeli ambassador in Athens reported that there was a short public ceremony by the Armenian community attended by liberal politicians and Greek parliament members”.<sup>19</sup> The consul in New York City replied that the Armenians had demonstrated on the 24 April and that this was broadcast by the American media.<sup>20</sup>

The Israeli MFA’s attempt to gather information about the activities of Armenian communities in the diaspora around 24 April was arguably not a coincidence given the developing crisis with Ankara. In other words, it seems that the MFA in Jerusalem was closely anticipating any Armenian provocation that Israel could then exploit as a means for rapprochement with Turkey.

### *Establishing the ‘Brothers in Arms’ Agenda*

A few days later after collecting the information above, the MFA wrote to the Israeli ambassador in Ankara, saying, “please emphasise to the Turkish MFA that every year we [MFA] take any possible action to secure the Turkish diplomats serving in Israel against any possible Armenian threat”. MFA wrote to Ankara also that “also with respect to Armenian terrorism, please emphasise to the Turks that, unfortunately, and even though we do so much to show our regret when Turkish diplomats have been assassinated abroad, we never hear from the Turks any condolences when Israel suffers these attacks”.<sup>21</sup> Assessing the above in light of the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations, the Israeli MFA identified that although there was a basis for the countries to align against terrorist organisations, there was an asymmetrical notion of the problem. The MFA in Jerusalem, therefore, sought to promote the idea of a common threat, even though the Turks seemed indifferent at that point in time. This strategy continued throughout the events explored in this chapter, however, and as time progressed became steadily more fruitful.

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<sup>18</sup> Rome to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 29 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/7607.

<sup>19</sup> Athens to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 29 April 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/7454.

<sup>20</sup> New York to Jerusalem, re: the Armenian Holocaust, 6 May 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1.

<sup>21</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, et al., re: Your meeting with Kamal, 2 May 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/3424; Jerusalem to Ankara, et al., re: Armenians, 2 May 1980, ISA/MFA/0002SE1/3578.

## **Advancing the Armenian-Palestinian Connection as a Problem for NATO and the Western Alliance**

In January 1981, after the Turkish MFA's final decision to downgrade Israeli-Turkish relations, the only leverage left for the Israelis was to find evidence that could demonstrate to the Turks that Armenian terrorism was cross-fertilised from Palestinian terrorism, and that they both also shared anti-Western aspirations. With the Turkish military elite in charge, and working hard both to institutionalise the denial of the Armenian genocide and to fight Armenian terrorism, that seemed like a sound strategy. In the following top-secret, but now declassified, document, Dr. Yaccov Cohen, the former Israeli ambassador in Ankara, and MFA Deputy Director General (1988-1992) wrote the following:

After the assassination of the Turkish diplomat in Sydney very recently, the Turkish media was heavily emphasising the connection between the PLO and the Armenians as well as communist countries and PLO. This media coverage had a tremendous impact on public debate in Turkey. This drove the PLO official in Ankara, Abu Firas, to firmly deny that connection. [...] Furthermore, if we can prove Abu Firas is lying, it could be priceless to our fight against the PLO in Turkey and elsewhere in the world. On the matter at hand, the PLO has been helping the Armenians to undertake terrorist activity against a Western country, [Turkey], a NATO member, showing that the terrorism against Israel is part of the overall Eastern bloc terrorism against the Western bloc. [...] But can we establish via our [Israel's] intelligence community any kind of evidence that we can use to support this account? If there is such data can it, subject to availability, be declassified and published? The way we can use this for diplomatic ends in the international media is priceless since the Turkish press is also affected by such reports.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Interrogation of Palestinian convict, 24 February 1981, ISA/MFA/0003G3R/87/81.

Without direct access to the Turkish diplomats, the Israeli MFA had to identify Turkish anti-terrorism discourse in the local media outlets. Further creative thinking was explored by Dr. Cohen to establish a possible connection between the Palestinians and the Armenians, using declassified and some published Israeli intelligence records in international media outlets. A few weeks later, David Granit, the Israeli consul in Ankara, wrote the following to Jerusalem:

Please inquire with the Israeli Intelligence services whether there is a Palestinian terrorist detained in one of our prisons who underwent his military training in PLO training facilities in Lebanon. If this Palestinian convict shared training with Armenians, Kurds or Turks, we could interrogate him and get a testimony which we could publish in an Israeli newspaper and then leverage this to our diplomatic ends in Turkey.<sup>23</sup>

This is an important document in that it shows that the Israelis were so anxious to establish a Palestinian-Armenian connection, or any other cooperation between Palestinian and anti-Turkish terrorism, that they would go as far as to interrogate a Palestinian convict to demonstrate to the Turkish elite that this connection was strong and solid. The proposal by Granit was in fact accepted by the MFA in Jerusalem; Moshe Kimhi wrote to the IGSS: “Our diplomats in Ankara have suggested a possibility to interview a Palestinian convict who was trained with Armenian terrorists. These details will help us to subvert the PLO-Turkish relations. We appreciate any help provided on this issue”.<sup>24</sup> In the following months, the Israeli pressure in this direction continued. In a report prepared by the MFA, the following assessment was emphasised:

The Palestinian elite in Lebanon choose to accept other countries’ terrorists for training purposes after thoroughly interrogating them about their past and origins. After these terrorists receive permission from the Palestinian organisations supervising the camps, they are trained as terrorists. To the PLO elite, it is well noted that these foreign terrorists came not just for

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<sup>23</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: PLO, 22 January 1981, ISA/MFA/0003G3R/13/81, 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> Kamhi to Bar Yehuda, re: PLO-Armenians, 12 March 1981, ISA/MFA/0003G3R

training, but also for cooperation with the PLO on executing mutual terrorist activity. The national resistance terrorist organisations have been established in Europe and South America to fight against their governments, not to fight for the Palestinians. Given that foreign terrorists cannot get quality training in their countries they can undertake this freely in Lebanon and Syria with no persecution by the authorities. The foreign terrorists also need logistics and funding support, which is given by the PLO in return for those terrorists helping the PLO to perpetrate terrorist activity against Israeli targets abroad. All the above should be set out in detail to the Turks.<sup>25</sup>

This MFA report reads as a summary made by the Israeli Intelligence agencies tasked with studying the methods of Palestinian terrorist schools from within. It shows how the training process was developed and, most importantly, the kind of exchanges possible between the Palestinians and the Armenians, or other foreign terrorists, and altogether serves to make the Israeli claims more compelling vis à vis Turkey and the Western alliance.

All in all, this section has uncovered how Israeli diplomats used Turkish counter-terrorism discourse in media outlets and intelligence research to establish a connection between Palestinians and Armenians in Lebanon. This could advance the agenda of Israeli diplomats in a number of ways: First, to restore Israeli-Turkish relations. Second, to make the Armenian-Palestinian connection a problem viewed in the context of NATO and the Western bloc / Eastern bloc stand-off; i.e. not just as individual national problems for Turkey or Israel but a shared problem for the Western alliance as a whole. Third, to use this connection to undermine Turkish-PLO relations, and thus to justify to Turkey, and indeed gain Turkey's tacit support for, Israel's fight against Palestinian terrorism.

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<sup>25</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, et al., re: PLO-Armenians, 09 April 1981, ISA/MFA/00033ZB/2344, 1–2.

## **Leveraging ASALA as a Means to a Rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish Relations (1982)**

As the Palestinian and Armenian terrorist activity intensified during late 1981 and early 1982, two additional research reports for use by Israeli diplomats and written by Israeli MFA officials, heavily stressed the interconnections between ASALA and Palestinian terrorist factions. The reports highlight that, during a press conference in Beirut in 1978, ASALA's leadership confirmed that they had close relations with Palestinian terrorist organisations. The MFA was notified from several sources that ASALA was being trained by PFLP members George Habash, Ahmed Jibril and Nayef Hawatmeh, who supplied arms and revolutionary propaganda.<sup>26</sup> Most of the cooperation between ASALA and the PFLP was undertaken in Lebanon, which was home to more than 200,000 Armenians, although other interconnections between ASALA and Palestinian terrorism were brokered through Fatah.<sup>27</sup> The report also stated that "during November 1980 two Palestinian terrorists holding Lebanese and Syrian passports were arrested by the Geneva police. They testified that they had been sent to perpetrate violence for ASALA".<sup>28</sup> In this particular example, the Palestinians were working for the Armenians; however, there were other cross-fertilisation activities. According to the French authorities, ASALA terrorists were involved in the murder on 23 November 1981 in Paris of the Dueks, a French Jewish couple who worked as travel agents. The Beretta guns used in this attack had an identical serial number to those used to murder the Turkish consul in Paris.<sup>29</sup>

These intelligence reports underscored the interconnections the Israeli MFA chose to outline for the Israeli diplomats, providing specific examples to be deployed should the topic be brought up in discussion with their foreign peers. By using several discrete examples, the Israelis proved, at least partially, the close engagement between Armenian and Palestinian terrorism, as was discussed briefly in the outset of the chapter. Specifically, the title of the document '*Palestinian-Armenian terror*' itself implies how the Israelis sought to introduce the connections between Palestinian and

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<sup>26</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, et al., 15 June 1982, ISA/MFA/00033ZB/657.

<sup>27</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, 15 June 1982, ISA/MFA/00033ZB/695.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Armenian terrorism to the Turkish diplomats.

In early June 1982, Mr. Ekurt Akbay, the administrative attaché of the Turkish embassy in Lisbon, was killed by Armenian terrorists. His wife was also shot and passed away a few months later as a result of her wounds.<sup>30</sup> At this time, Alon Liel, the Israeli Chargé d'affaires in Ankara (1981–1983) sought to reach out to the Turks and offer some condolences in their fight against Armenian terrorism. Liel wrote to İlhan Öztürk, the Turkish Foreign Minister at the time, that Israel would like to express its deepest condolences upon the assassination of Mr. Akbay, administrative attaché in the embassy of Turkey in Portugal. Israel said that it condemned this and previous cold-blooded murders and hoped that the civilised world would join hands in fighting international terrorism.<sup>31</sup>

Subsequently, Alon Liel reported to the MFA in Jerusalem that Öztürk had replied to his condolence letter. Ordinarily, Liel wrote, only administrators in the Turkish MFA replied to him, but in this case Öztürk replied directly to stress his appreciation of the need to join forces to fight back against international terror.<sup>32</sup> Öztürk noted that “Turkey would be interested in cooperation with Israel in this specific area”.<sup>33</sup>

Although Öztürk’s reply could have been assessed as a good sign of possible future cooperation, Israel may have overstated its significance since Öztürk’s response, although polite, offered little specific detail as to the nature of any proposed collaboration between Ankara and Jerusalem.

### *Implementing the ‘Brothers in Arms’ Agenda*

An attempt to assassinate Israel’s ambassador in London (1979–82), Shlomo Argov, led to the Knesset decision, on 4 June 1982, to invade Southern Lebanon in order to secure Israel’s northern border, and this conflict soon escalated into a full-scale war. Although there were clear parallels between the attack on Argov and the assassinations of Turkish diplomats by Armenian terrorists, the Turkish military elite remained

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed account of that event, see Göçek, *Denial of Violence*, 446.

<sup>31</sup> Alon Liel to İlhan Öztürk, 8 June, 1982, ISA/MFA/00030TJ/695.

<sup>32</sup> Report, 29 April 1982, ISA/MFA/00033ZB/8364/1.

<sup>33</sup> İlhan Öztürk to Alon Liel, 9 June 1982, ISA/MFA/00030TJ/695.

indifferent to Israel's operation in Lebanon. Nonetheless, the Israeli MFA continued to push the thesis regarding Soviet-sponsored Middle Eastern terrorism and Palestinian terrorism as being an umbrella covering other similar terrorist organisations, such as ASALA. This was an attempt to label all of this terrorism as a common threat to Western bloc interests in the Middle East. As presented earlier in this thesis, however, at this point, Turkey's dependence on the Arab countries as its energy suppliers, and the resultant pressure to boycott Israel, meant that the Turkish MFA did not cooperate with Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

A document signed by Alon Liel notes that during his last meeting with Turkish MFA official Elykim Kirzfa, the latter proposed that Ankara is open for interesting suggestions regarding the issue of combatting Armenian terrorism.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, Liel said that "I, [Liel] had a counter proposition that the Israeli MFA could share with Ankara our expertise from our recent investigations of the Argov assassination attempt and against our late diplomat Yaacov Bar-Simantov [who was murdered in Paris in April 1982]. We can translate those documents into English, but we need your [MFA] approval first".<sup>35</sup> Liel concluded the document by addressing the task of managing Israeli-Turkish expectations, arguing that four months earlier Turkey had founded a special unit to combat Armenian terrorism. Karifa responded, noting very clearly that, "our [Israel's] motivation to help them with uprooting Armenian terrorism can greatly impact the future of our relations".<sup>36</sup>

This document is another valuable reflection of the tense state of Israeli-Turkish relations, with the Israelis attempting to court Turkey on the basis of knowledge sharing, proposing a mutual agenda as 'brothers in arms' against terrorism.<sup>37</sup> One can evaluate that there was a shared recognition that the assassinations of diplomats perpetrated by the PFLP on Israeli targets and those perpetrated by ASALA on Turkish targets used the same terrorist methods, betraying the close affiliation of those two groups in Lebanon. In other words, Ankara could use the Israelis' expertise in understanding how these assassinations were planned and executed, in the expectation

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<sup>34</sup> Ankara to Istanbul, 15 June 1982, ISA/MFA/00030TJ/690.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, 9 June 1982, ISA/MFA/00033ZB/681.

that this would be useful in combatting ASALA. The Israelis, by contrast, could have benefitted by communicating in concrete terms that Palestinian terrorism was closely linked to that of ASALA. Contextualising this to the looming First Lebanon War, we can see the subtle encouragement of the Turks to soft-pedal on any inclination (whether from domestic or international Muslim/Arab opinion) to be too critical of Israeli actions in Lebanon.

Liel further elaborates in an oral interview on the military/diplomatic measures undertaken by MFA. Turning to the cooperation between the Palestinian terror organisations and ASALA, in June 1982, Israel demolished Palestinian and ASALA training facilities in Southern Lebanon. Israel thereby hoped to regain Turkey's trust by disrupting ASALA operations in Lebanon. The IDF also retrieved 28 files on Armenian terrorists. Israel could have forwarded these directly from the IDF to the Turkish Army or from the IISO to the Turkish MIT. The MFA, however, wished to get diplomatic credit from these files. Liel therefore approached Oktay Beşkardeş, who was the Turks' pivot man managing the operation against ASALA and delivered the files personally to him. Liel reports that Beşkardeş took the files and studied them in depth, but never thanked him: "Nevertheless, it was clear to us [Israel] that fighting the regional terror was a joint Israeli-Turkish interest".<sup>38</sup> This serves as further evidence of Israel's attempts to label Palestinian-Armenian terror as a shared concern with Turkey.

A few months after the Argov assassination attempt, more evidence of a possible link between Palestinian and Armenian terrorist activities emerged, this time from London. The Israeli diplomat, Michael Pelled, wrote to Jerusalem that a senior British consul contacted him to report that on 9 September 1982, Zeven Bedross, a member of ASALA, was arrested in London with three other members of the organisation. He was armed with a gun and other explosives, and the terrorists were planning to assassinate the Turkish ambassador in London. In a Cold War context, the British authorities were now very concerned that ASALA would plan a retaliatory attack against UK interests

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<sup>38</sup> Liel, 3 September 2015; Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Armenian Terrorism, 19 August 1982, ISA/MFA/0003676/2365. With respect to Liel's oral account, Oleg Kuznetsov has argued recently (2015) in his work, based on retrieved CIA documents, that "The achievements of IDF in southern Lebanon and Beirut in 1982 led to the destruction and uprooting of the existing infrastructure of Armenian terrorism". See Oleg Kuznetsov, "Armenia, Transnational Terrorism and Global Interests: What Do CIA and DoS Documents Suggest?", *Caucasus International* 5, no. 2 (2015): 47.



in North America, Western Europe or the Middle East, and they were therefore asking for any information or evaluation that Israel might hold on ASALA.<sup>39</sup>

Although the Turks were mostly indifferent to the IDF's operation in June 1982, specifically the operation against ASALA training facilities in Southern Lebanon, Ankara did show initial interest during October 1982 in the perceived achievements Israel had made with respect to Armenian terrorists. Shmuel Divon from MFA Middle Eastern department reported to Ankara:

From my conversation with Zevi Bandory, director of unit 470 in the IGSS, Israel does not hold in custody any Armenian terrorists allegedly captured in Lebanon or any other Armenians held under arrest in Israel. The IGSS already clarified to the Turkish source that we do not hold Armenian terrorists in Israel thus we cannot give away to Turks what we do not have. Bandory speculated that the Turkish source (which is a reliable one) asked us to see how we react and whether we hold any important information on Armenian terrorists.<sup>40</sup>

In summary, drawing together the last two sections of MFA diplomatic activity in the context of the Israel-Turkey crisis, as shown in chapter one of the thesis, it is evident that the suspended relations had put Israel on the defensive. Jerusalem's strategies for re-engaging with Ankara were to leverage its intelligence about ASALA, while also re-emphasising the links between Armenian and Palestinian terrorism and reiterating the shared nature of the terrorist threat they faced. Not least in respect to the anti-Western, Soviet-supported element of that threat, but also in order to encourage Turkey to soft-pedal criticism of Israeli actions in Lebanon. This Cold War dimension will now be re-examined. All in all, the Turks began to show the first signs of interest regarding the data that the Israeli MFA could provide on Armenians.

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<sup>39</sup> London to Jerusalem, Re: Intensifying Security to the British Embassy, 12 September 1982, ISA/MFA/0003676.

<sup>40</sup> Divon to Ankara, 6 October 1982, ISA/MFA/0003ZB.

### **Netanyahu-Kissinger Meeting (1983)**

In the context of the renewed East-West polarisation in the late Cold War, and especially in a Middle Eastern context, the suspended Israeli-Turkish relations remained a focus of considerable concern within the Israeli MFA. To address this, the MFA was operating behind the scenes, using sub-state actors to promote the renewal of the Israeli-American-Turkish alliance. In this context there were a number of telegrams between Hanan Bar-On, Deputy General Manager of the Israeli MFA (1979–1987) and Benjamin Netanyahu, then Deputy Chief of Mission at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, DC, (1982–1984) regarding this issue. Bar-On wrote “Dear ‘Bibi’, on the eve of Mr. Kissinger’s trip to Israel and his stopover in Turkey, please address the following issues regarding Israel-Turkey bilateral relations. Dr Kissinger’s views are very important to Turkey”.<sup>41</sup> Bar-On further noted that during 1974 and the US arms embargo, Kissinger actually defended Ankara from further antagonistic measures from the US administration and encouraged Netanyahu to argue that the stagnant relations between Israel and Turkey, initiated by Ankara, were extremely harmful to Israel, Turkey and the United States.<sup>42</sup>

Bar-On continued that both countries were suffering from terrorist organisations operating against them with the full support of the Soviet Union and the Arab nations in the Middle East. In this regard, Ankara’s treatment of the PLO as a legitimate power and its support for the establishment of a Palestinian state was helping to drive Palestinian and international terrorism. Bar-On argued that the connection between the PLO and anti-Turkish terrorism [ASALA] was well known, and that the Lebanon War had demonstrated this.<sup>43</sup> Netanyahu replied briefly to Bar-On that his outline was very clear and that the Israeli embassy in Washington DC was planning to initiate a meeting between Kissinger and the Israeli ambassador in Washington DC (Meir Rozen, 1983–1987) prior to Kissinger’s trip.<sup>44</sup>

These telegrams undoubtedly demonstrate Israeli recurring problems with Ankara. Combining these documents with the earlier attempts to approach Alexander

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<sup>41</sup> Jerusalem to Washington, DC, re: Dr Henry Kissinger’s Visit to Turkey, 5 June 1983, ISA/MFA/0003679, 1

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Bibi to Bar-On, re: Kissinger, 7 June 1983, ISA/MFA/0003679.

Haig in late 1981, it is clear that there is a pattern in which Israel was seeking to approach high-ranking personnel in the American administration/Congress with a professional record that was respected by both parties to act as intermediaries on their behalf, and that a key supporting argument to gain the support of these intermediaries—and one to be relayed to the Turks—was that good relations between Israel and Turkey were in the interests of the Western Bloc and, specifically, the US.

### **Normalisation of Israeli-Turkish Relations and Counter-Terrorism (1985–1987)**

As the second chapter has showed, by late 1985 a gradual improvement in relations was evident as Israeli assistance to improve Turkey's position. At the same time intensified international pressure on Turkey regarding the 'Armenian question' became more evident. In August 1985 Lior wrote to the Middle East department and to Istanbul that 'a friend of Israel', the former Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, Kamuran Gürün, put Yehuda Milo (the Israeli Chargé d'affaires in Ankara during 1985–1990) in contact with the Directorate General of Intelligence and Research at the Turkish MFA. The aim had been to conduct a dialogue on counter-terrorism. Lior concluded, however, that the Turks did not want a dialogue at that point.<sup>45</sup>

Gürün's proposal was a significant breakthrough. The proposal indicated that Ankara acknowledged Israel's proven ability to fight regional terror. This offer came from the Turkish individual who had been a prominent figure in the Turkish denial campaign of the 1980s and Turkey's MFA in the 1980s. The above further goes to show that from here on, the Turkish MFA itself partly believed that the 'Armenian question' could be resolved by making use of Israel's support for Turkey's denial narrative.

In January 1986, the Turks finally agreed to undertake a special symposium of the Israel-Turkish foreign affairs research departments, promising that if this was considered a success then it would help to upgrade diplomatic relations. In Milo's view, the Armenian issue was the trigger for the slight rapprochement with Özal's

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<sup>45</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, A meeting with Directorate General of Intelligence and Research, 31 July 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPG; MFA to Middle East Department, re: relations with Turkey, 9 August 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPG

administration.<sup>46</sup>

Gürün's proposal was a diplomatic milestone in the Israeli-Turkish relations of the 1980s. Both the 'brothers in arms' approach in the telegrams sent to Turkish diplomats after the Armenian assassinations, as well as Liel's attempts to broker a rapprochement with the Turks by using the Armenian files during the Lebanon operation proved to be effective. As Milo noted in his document, the Armenian dimension was "the only strong point we can offer to the Turks right now", which also suggests that the efforts would continue in this direction.<sup>47</sup>

### *1986: ASALA and the Contested Memories of the Armenian Genocide*

This section engages with the various findings from the previous sections, seeking to tie them together to provide a conclusive answer to Israel's position in respect to ASALA and the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. In early 1986, after ASALA activity had declined, claims regarding the Armenian genocide remained an acute problem for the Turks. In this context, another declassified document demonstrates the new scope for Israel's efforts to prove loyalty to the Turks and to state once again Israel's official position against ASALA. The Israeli Chargé d'affaires, Yehuda Milo, was called to meet İlhan Yiğitbaşıoğlu, Turkey's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, due to an Israeli academic publication on ASALA.<sup>48</sup> Yiğitbaşıoğlu made the accusation that the authors of the academic paper had argued that one of ASALA's critical mistakes was not being selective enough with its targets.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Yiğitbaşıoğlu alleged that because the publisher was Tel Aviv University, an Israeli state university, and that two members of the editorial committee were Yitzhak Rabin and Mordechai Gur, the publication represented Israel's official stance on the issue of ASALA.<sup>50</sup> Finally, Yiğitbaşıoğlu noted to Milo that Ankara believed that Israel was applying double standards in respect to their attitude to ASALA

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<sup>46</sup> Jerusalem, re: The Turkish-Israeli Relations, January 1986, ISA/MFA/000XCSV/292, 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Anat Kurz and Ariel Merari, *ASALA: Irrational Terror or Political Tool* (Jerusalem: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies and Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Ankara to Istanbul, re: Turkey-Israel, 27 January 1986, ISA/MFA/0003BPU, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 1; Yitzhak Rabin was IDF commander-in-chief, politician and then prime minister (1974–1977, 1992–1995); Mordechai Gur was also commander-in-chief (1974–1978) and became a politician.

“that supports the Armenian lies on the alleged Armenian massacre”.<sup>51</sup>

Milo replied that although he had not read the publication thoroughly, Jerusalem cannot accept that the Israeli government is applying double standards in this regard. He stated that Israel held the very firm position that terror is terror is terror, and that there was no difference as to whether this was Armenian or Palestinian terror, and that Ankara was very familiar with Israel’s position on this issue.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Milo explained that Tel Aviv University was a completely independent institution and that some Israeli university institutions published research papers that Israel’s government was not pleased with, and the fact that public figures [Rabin and Gur] might contribute their names to the boards of the publishing houses of public institutions does not demonstrate that the Israeli government was behind these publications.<sup>53</sup> Lastly, Milo then referred Yiğitbaşıoğlu to the Israeli efforts in Washington, DC: “It is also well known to the Turkish MFA our latest and honest actions to help them with the Armenian resolution which clearly reflects Israel’s position on this issue”.<sup>54</sup> A few days later, Lior wrote to Milo that according to current academic research in the field of international terrorism, the international support that the Palestinians had garnered despite their terrorist activities demonstrated that other terror organisations, such as ASALA, could be encouraged to carry out attacks in order to gain international recognition of their problems.<sup>55</sup>

To recap, these two documents uncover the continued use of Armenian terrorism as a means to encourage the rapprochement of the Israeli-Turkish relations even into the normalisation period, recognising how the Armenian issue as a whole continued to be a source of considerable Turkish concern in the mid-1980s. Specifically, the documents explain how the contested memories of the Armenian genocide were used by the Israeli and, subsequently, Turkish diplomats during the crisis, and later, as an opportunity to improve their diplomatic relations. The evidence from Milo here connects the various sections of this chapter by addressing issues such

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>55</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, re: Your Conversation with Yiğitbaşıoğlu-Armenians, 3 February 1986, ISA/MFA/0003BPR

as Israel's approach to terrorism as a widespread Middle Eastern phenomenon and Israel's work behind the scenes in Washington DC against the Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress. Even though the Armenian resolution in Washington DC is worthy of a study of its own, this section shows that Israel's successful attempts to uproot Armenian terrorism from Lebanon, driven by the gradual improvement in the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem (1985–1987), encouraged the Turks to put continual pressure on the Israel MFA and Jewish American Organisations in regard to the Armenian issue. This pressure drove Israel and the Jewish organisations to continually prove their 'loyalty' to the Turkish disputed narrative and to intensify their efforts to block the Armenians.

### **Research Forum Against Middle Eastern Terrorism (1987)**

Thereafter, in mid-1987 the Israeli efforts for a joint Israeli-Turkish endeavour to eradicate Middle Eastern terrorism finally matured. In an extremely secret document signed by Yakov Hadas-Handelsman, Deputy Chief of Mission, Israeli Embassy in Ankara (1986–1989), Turkish and Israeli officials from national security research institutes held their first symposium with respect to fighting regional terrorism. Gideon Ben Ami, Israel's former ambassador in Sweden (1994–1999), and one of the individuals who managed the Lebanon Middle East department in the Israeli MFA, participated in that symposium. Ben Ami recalls that the aim of the symposium was to 'compare notes'. The fact that it took place at all was seen as a big achievement.<sup>56</sup> Daniel Mokady, who also attended, asserted in an oral interview that Israel's relations with Ankara were still at a low ebb in 1986, and that the MFA was still seeking to get its foot in the door. In this regard, Mokady noted that Israel had a great deal of leverage over the Turks because "we had a lot of information that they did not have. It was extremely important for Israel that the Turks should see the meeting as a good opportunity for them".<sup>57</sup>

Before tapping into the minutes of the symposium, the oral accounts of Ben Ami and Mokady takes us back to how the Israeli MFA viewed it as a diplomatic

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<sup>56</sup> Oral interview with Gideon Ben Ami, 20 October 2016, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>57</sup> Interview, Mokady, 30 October 2016.

instrument of Israeli-Turkish relations in 1986-1987. Both Ben Ami and Mokady were able to convey the degree to which the merit of the symposium lay in Israel's ability to get its foot in the door after almost a decade of frozen relations, rather than any actual knowledge exchange, especially since the knowledge Turkey shared with Israel was apparently minimal. Initiating a renewed dialogue and giving the Turks the feeling that Israeli diplomats held valuable intelligence was another key to the Israeli-Turkish exchange that could lead to further meetings and, potentially, normalised relations.

Turning to the symposium, in the interlocutory notes, Hadas-Handelsman wrote to Jerusalem and outlined that the Turkish chief of a national security research institute, Eirhan Itabsholu, noted to the participants that the meeting was taking place during a difficult period for the Turks which he [Itabsholu] identified as a crisis for the Turks, due to the European Parliament's decision to adopt the 'Armenian resolution'.<sup>58</sup> According to Hadas-Handelsman, Itabsholu also mentioned that the Turks hoped that this meeting would be established as a professional forum for both Turks and Israelis and would help them to enhance cooperation against Middle Eastern terrorism.<sup>59</sup> The Israeli chief of the national security research institute at the time, Daniel Mokady, stressed that this forum was very important to both countries since "whether we want this or not, we are both in the same basket".<sup>60</sup>

Later, the Turkish deputy chief of a national security research institute, Ünal Maraşlı, addressed the Armenian issue and gave his Israeli colleague a copy of the official Turkish letter handed the same day to the European Parliament in response to the Armenian resolution.<sup>61</sup> Then, Itabsholu proceeded to assess the Armenian resolution and the terror problem; Hadas-Handelsman notes that Maraşlı expressed the Turks' disappointment about the Armenian resolution since they had failed in their efforts to ensure that the resolution was passed without using the term 'genocide'. The Turks had hoped that they would manage to convince the Parliament to use less provocative words such as massacre, which according to Maraşlı "the Turks could have lived with

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<sup>58</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: Turkey-Meeting of National Security Research Institute, 24 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000X44Y, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6.

although they were against the term massacre too”.<sup>62</sup>

Hadas-Handelsman notes at this juncture that, since the European Parliament had not made the final resolution regarding the Armenian issue, and as this resolution could take a while, the Armenians were disappointed too. Maraşlı stated that the Turks were now upset and concerned since the Armenians had not yet achieved their goal—i.e. a genocide resolution—and thus they might renew the terror attacks against Turkish officials. This point and more, are studied during the final chapter of the thesis which focuses on the Armenian resolution at the European Parliament.

Furthermore, Hadas-Handelsman reports that Daniel Mokady handed the Turks some Armenian propaganda. At this point, Maraşlı asked the Israelis if they could provide an update regarding ASALA activity, since they [the Turks] knew that after the Lebanon war (1982–1985) the ASALA facilities in southern Lebanon had been uprooted.<sup>63</sup> Mokady replied to Maraşlı that before the Israelis came to Ankara he had checked with the Israeli intelligence services and could not find any vital information, excluding the Armenian propaganda he had handed over. In his first-hand account, Daniel Mokady recalls that the Israeli impressions from this symposium was that the Turks did not hold any significant information in the field of terrorism, in fact he indicated that the Turks contributed almost nothing to Israel’s knowledge. For Israel, however, it was more critical that the Turkish head of division said at the end of the meeting, “let’s plan the second symposium”.<sup>64</sup>

Turning back to the document, at this point, Hadas-Handelsman mentioned that the Turks asked about the Armenian community in Israel, and both Daniel Mokady and Gideon Ben Ami stressed that Israeli intelligence did not conduct any kind of tracking of the Armenian community in Israel.<sup>65</sup>

A few days after the mutual counter-terrorism meeting was held, Milo wrote to Jerusalem that after an eight-hour meeting including exchanging knowledge and evaluations along with a friendly lunch, the day had come to an end. The meeting had been defined by the Turks as extremely helpful and friendly even though some of the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Interview, Mokady, 30 October 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Ankara to the Jerusalem, 23 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000X44Y, 2



Turkish elite were highly anxious given the Armenian achievements in the European Parliament and the acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide bill. Lastly, the Turks also agreed to hold another meeting in Israel soon.<sup>66</sup> In summary, it appears that the ‘brothers in arms’ agenda, which had been followed by the Israelis for a number of years during the 1980s, had eventually paid off.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Israel’s desire to repair its relations with Turkey between 1980 and 1985 drove Israeli diplomats to label ASALA terrorist activity as stimulated by Palestinians and the Soviets against a NATO member. This was intended to help Israel on two fronts: firstly, in fighting Palestinian terrorism against Israeli targets and, secondly, in restoring Israeli-Turkish relations. Hence, Israeli diplomats used Armenian terrorism and its apparent affiliation with a similar brand of Palestinian terrorism and Soviet left-wing terrorism as a diplomatic tool. The Armenian-Palestinian shared activity was not only a priceless asset to restore Israeli-Turkish relations, but also to justify Israel’s battle against Palestinian organisations, especially the conflict in Lebanon in 1982, and thus the Israeli diplomats tried various methods to establish more evidence regarding this premise.

With respect to the role of ASALA in the above strategy, a few reflections need to be stressed. First, undoubtedly, there were at least some interconnections between radical Palestinian terrorist groups and ASALA, as demonstrated in various Israeli MFA reports—including close political agendas and affiliation to the Soviet bloc—but also more practical similarities, such as methods of operation, mutual training faculties in Lebanon, and cooperation in undertaking terrorist activities. These facts made the Israeli thesis regarding ASALA/Palestinian terrorism as being a mutual concern with Ankara more compelling. This data was used by Israeli diplomats, especially in the early years of the crisis (1981–1983) as a diplomatic strategy to influence the Turkish diplomats to change their approach to Israel. Second, between 1981 and 1983 Jerusalem had failed to persuade Turkey to join a unified front against Middle Eastern terrorism. Despite this disappointing outcome for Jerusalem, two factors justified the continuation

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<sup>66</sup> Ankara to the Jerusalem, 24 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000XCED/14203.

of the ‘brothers in arms’ strategy: the military coup and the subsequent institutionalisation of the denial narrative of the Armenian genocide by the Turkish military elite, and the fact that the fight against terrorism—specifically against ASALA—was at its peak.

Third, gradually, from 1985 onwards, the consistent diplomatic efforts paid off, side by side with the normalisation process advanced by Özal’s civil administration, as shown in the second chapter. This was mainly due to the intensification of genocide allegations against Turkey in several Western international forums, namely the USHMM, US Congress and European Parliament, which were contested by both Israelis and American Jews. These were clearly intersecting with the 1987 symposium against terrorism. This upturn demonstrates the chapter’s premise that counter-terrorism, and its specific form during the late Cold War and in the Middle Eastern context, could provide a powerful means to bring about a diplomatic rapprochement between the two regional and Cold War allies.

To recap, as was demonstrated in earlier sections of this chapter and in the previous part of the thesis, the Israeli diplomats recruited Kissinger as a respected and high-ranking American official to convey to Ankara that rehabilitation of Israeli-Turkish relations was something the US supported, and that part of this was the unwavering opposition of the US to radical anti-Western terrorism: specifically, Soviet-supported terror (such as ASALA and radical left Palestinian terror organisations).

In conclusion, ASALA’s terrorist activity and the way Israel exploited this to improve relations with Turkey also provide a template to understand the Israeli policy towards the contested memories of the Armenian genocide as they appeared during the late 1970s and 1980s. ASALA should be understood as a substantial yet overlooked factor, albeit one amongst a few related factors such as the USHMM, the 1982 conference, the European Parliament and US Congress resolutions, that shaped Israel’s treatment of the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in order to attain a diplomatic rapprochement with Turkey.

# Chapter 6

## The 1982 Holocaust and Genocide Conference and the Question of the Iranian and Syrian Jews

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on two phenomena: the first is the notable Holocaust and genocide studies conference of June 1982, which was planned to take place in Jerusalem, Israel. Amongst the numerous panels on Holocaust and genocide studies that the steering committee planned to include were—for the very first time in the emerging discipline and in such an international forum—six lectures on the Armenian genocide. The second phenomenon, which ran in parallel with this scholarly event, was Israel's national security interest in safeguarding the route through Turkey for Jewish transit immigrants. As noted in the first chapter of the thesis, Iranian Jews were fleeing from Iran after the 1979 Iranian revolution which targeted the Jews as a 'fifth column' acting on behalf of Israel.<sup>1</sup> The remaining Jews in Syria had also been seeking refuge from Hafez Al Assad's dictatorship since the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter I argue that Israel's wish to protect the escape route of the Jewish refugees drove the Israeli MFA, in collaboration with Jewish American organisations and the Jewish-Turkish elite, to pressure the

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Habib Elghanian a Persian Jew and the head of the Teheran Jewish community, was publicly executed by the Khomeini regime on 9 May 1979. He was executed for being a Jew and for supporting the regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. David B. Green, "This Day in Jewish History/An Execution in Iran", *Haaretz*, 9 May 2014. See: [www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-an-execution-in-iran-1.5247705](http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-an-execution-in-iran-1.5247705) (accessed 28 June 2018). For a short discussion regarding Israeli concern about the Iranian Jews during the revolution, see among others: Haggai Ram, "Between Homeland and Exile: Iranian Jewry in Zionist/Israeli Political Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 1 (2008): 1–20, (especially 4–5).

<sup>2</sup> Arye Cohen's seminal work has broken important ground with respect to the state of the Syrian Jews since the 1970s, and their attempts to flee Syria under Hafez Al Assad's dictatorship; Arye Cohen, "Jews of Syria and Lebanon: Their State and the Struggle to Save them 1930–2000," (Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, Israel, 2003). [in Hebrew]. In 1975 the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (hereafter, WOJAC) was funded by the Israeli government, the MFA and the Jewish agency, and managed by the vice-chair of the Knesset, Mordechai Ben-Porat, who thought successive Israeli governments did not apply effective pressure on the Arab nations' governments to improve the status of their local Jewish communities. Therefore, the WOJAC was established to foster cooperation of Jewish communities around the world and put the fate of the Arab Jews in the hands of the Jews in the Western world. See for example: Yehouda Shenhav, "Ethnicity and National Memory: The World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) in the Context of the Palestinian National Struggle," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 27–56. (especially, 31–33).

steering committee of the 1982 conference to remove the Armenian genocide panels from the conference agenda. This was done to avoid provoking Turkey into taking measures against the Jewish refugees.

While the chapter has two core narratives, as introduced above, its analysis taps into two dimensions: Israeli/Jewish (as its core analysis), and alongside this the Turkish dimension. First and foremost, in respect to securing Israel's national security interests in the Middle East the MFA and Jewish organisations are the key to understanding Israel's policy on the conference issue. Yet, Turkey's own national interests are explored in depth in this chapter: specifically, the degree to which Turkey attempted to leverage the so-called protection of Jews within its borders. In short, Turkey's contested policy builds upon a myth of rescuing Turkish Jews during the period of Nazi persecution in WWII. Arguably, and in contrast to most of the historiographic analysis shown so far, the Turks suggested that the help they offered to Jews to cross their borders in the 1970s–1980s was in fact a longstanding policy or, in their words, a 'humanitarian gesture'.<sup>3</sup> As will be further elaborated in this chapter, this put Turkey in an auspicious position to pressure Israel to eject the Armenians from the conference. Most importantly, this humanitarian gesture also provides a backdrop to the subsequent chapter on the USHMM. The Turks used their humanitarian gesture vis à vis the Jews to bolster their public image in the US.

As noted in the literature review section, this chapter also deals with two methodological challenges; firstly, since many missions to rescue Jews fleeing from Syria and Iran were undertaken by the IISO, and since that archive is sealed for more than 70 years, it is not actually possible to study and properly evaluate these events and their impact on Israel's foreign policy. Specifically, in the context of this chapter, the

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<sup>3</sup> In a recent and rapidly developing historiographic debate, only one work by Stanford Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) sided with the Turkish myth of rescue as an actual policy. Others, relying mainly on archival records, have argued that the Turkish policy is a myth. See for example: Rifat Bali, *Turkish Jews in the Early Republic: An Adventure in Turkification, 1923–1945* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999); Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); I. İzzet Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2015). In the larger research puzzle on this topic there is still little unbroken ground which studied the years of the Nazi regime and how Turkey treated Jewish refugees during this period, (1933–1939); see for example: Corry Guttstadt, "Turkey—Welcoming Jewish Refugees" in *Bystanders, Rescuers or Perpetrators? The Neutral Countries and the Shoah* eds. Corry Guttstadt et al. (Berlin: Metropol Verlag & IHRA, 2016), 53–64.

archival materials are fragmented and, given that this is uncharted terrain, much of my analysis is based on the oral interviews I have conducted with Israeli diplomats and IISO officials. A second difficulty that is embedded in the first one is that much of Israel's clandestine diplomacy was also not fully shared with MFA officials. This means that many of these operations are not documented in MFA archival records. This chapter, therefore, represents a first attempt to consolidate the knowledge that can be gleaned from oral histories of the Israeli intelligence elite and MFA diplomats with respect to these issues and to connect them with the overall research puzzle of the thesis.

The chapter is divided into four main parts. The first part briefly elaborates the challenges when researching diplomatic activities that were essentially conducted in secret. Specifically, a short history is laid out of Israel's activities to protect Jews and their communities worldwide since 1948, based on oral accounts. The second part, meanwhile, discusses the refugee issue from a Turkish foreign policy perspective (especially in respect to Israeli-Turkish relations); as Turkey's humanitarian gesture of saving refugees—Jews among them—and, specifically, the Turkish myth of rescuing Turkish Sephardic Jews during the Holocaust. Although the chapter, and the entire thesis, focuses on the Israeli perspective, in the context of the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations, a short analysis of Turkish foreign policy is essential for an understanding of the sort of pressure exerted by Turkey on the steering committee and to clarify the reaction of Israeli/Jewish organisations to this pressure. The third part studies the geopolitical setting of the Syrian and Iranian Jews, and their escape path through Turkey in the context of the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations. This part includes a detailed analysis of diplomatic engagements between the two countries via the auspices of the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereafter UNHCR) and American Jewish organisations. The fourth and last part draws together the above to explore the events surrounding the 1982 conference and specifically the interconnections between the Jewish refugee crisis and the interference in the conference agenda.

## **The Diplomacy of Holocaust Survivors**

In relation to those who planned and undertook the rescue of Jews in distress, the following three accounts cast some light on the general mission of saving and protecting Jews as a national, Zionist mission. Efraim Halevy, ninth Director of IISO (1998–2002), and the second head of the National Security Council (2002–2003) assesses this from his point of view:

Once Israel was established in 1948, there was a critical decision by the early 1950s by David Ben Gurion that one of Israel's core missions was to rescue Jews from hostile Middle Eastern countries. In the early years (1950s) it was obvious to us (Israel executive forces), that Jewish communities cannot continue to live peacefully in Arab and some Muslim countries which were hostile to Israel. This operation began right after the Holocaust which we could not stop, unfortunately. Therefore, we rescued more than 100,000 Iraqi Jews, and the same number of Jews from Yemen. As an overview, in the early 1950s it was Yemeni and Iraqi Jews, then Morocco in the 1960s and Iranian and Syrian Jews in the late 1970s [...] Furthermore, it is important to stress that the mission of saving Jews had another important objective. It helped us [Israel] to dramatically increase the Jewish population of Israel, which amounted to only 650,000 in 1948.<sup>4</sup>

Nachik Navoth, who was the deputy director of the IISO between 1982 and 1984 and director of the *Tevel*,<sup>5</sup> which was established specifically for this mission, cast more light on how these operations were perceived within the IISO:

Israel's intelligence community has been dealing with a unique mission: rescuing protecting and saving Jews worldwide; I personally conducted the operation with the Kurdish Jews, Morocco and finally the Ethiopian Jews. It was a core guideline in our (the IISO) activity. [...] The results of the

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<sup>4</sup> Oral interview with Efraim Halevy, 8 June, 2016, Tel Aviv, Israel.

<sup>5</sup> '*Tevel*' is a Hebrew word that means 'Universe', here a unit in the IISO's foreign liaison department. Among other things, IISO has been responsible for the mission of securing Jews worldwide and helping them to immigrate to Israel.

Holocaust intensified this grand strategy; we had to make sure that all the Jews were protected and if they wanted to immigrate to Israel that they always could. Another principle was punishing those who operate against the Jews, as in the Eichmann trial.<sup>6</sup>

Both Halevy and Navoth reflect on the necessity of the operation to protect Jews in distress, with a focus on the geographical factors in the rescue mission and a comparative framework to understand these rescues. Both emphasise the aim and the rationale of the Jewish factor in protecting Israel's interests in the Middle East. Placing these accounts side by side also reveals how the memory of the Holocaust underpinned the work of the IISO across more than four decades. This is an important claim that acts as the basis for the 'never again' factor of the Israeli memory of the Holocaust reflected in the individual memories of the first and second generations of Israeli officials who had been impacted by it.

With this in mind, Reuven Merhav, a former senior IISO official (1961–1983), further noted in an oral interview that “the officials working in the IISO did not have the specific need to speak about it [the Holocaust]. It was always in the air. The first generation in the IISO, some were survivors, they came from Europe, and they lost their families. Everyone had their own special connection to the Holocaust. I lost my grandparents. [...] in this context, the first generation of IISO officials confronted the first Neo-Nazi movements established in South America, which threatened the safety of local Jewish communities”.<sup>7</sup>

This is a powerful account that provides us with a snapshot of the unspoken, shared memory culture of Israeli intelligence and diplomatic elite from Israel's early years of statehood into the 1980s. Merhav provides a useful background to the mindset of some of these elite, who not only were civil servants, but also second generation Holocaust survivors. This is in line with the assessment in the literature review, and much like the work of Israeli scholars who were Holocaust survivors, it helps us to think about two connected points: first, when these officials confronted neo-Nazi movements in South America, they probably were driven also by their personal memories of the

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<sup>6</sup> Oral interview with Nachik Navoth, 9 September, 2015, Ramat Hashron, Israel.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Merhav, 23 July, 2017.

Holocaust, including their own family trauma. Second, how and why the Israeli elite could ‘trade’ the memory of the Armenian genocide in order to safeguard the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust and to protect the Iranian and Syrian Jews.

Along these lines of personal memories of the Holocaust among the Israeli elite, Halevey further noted: “Meir Dagan’s [tenth director of the IISO (2002–2011)] grandfather’s photo [Ber Erlich Sloshtny, see appendix three and four] was a very dramatic, powerful and personal illustration of Dagan’s personal Holocaust memory. I also had a few cousins who died in the Holocaust. Certainly, this memory is something that I think about, and has been influencing me. I see our operations more as empowering Jews and Israel rather than just rescuing Jews”.<sup>8</sup> This reads as if Halevey is trying to use the magnitude of Dagan’s family Holocaust memory which became public in 2015, to legitimise the memory of his family narrative, suggesting that Dagan’s revelations were common amongst the Israeli elite of their generation. Dagan himself noted in an interview to an Israeli newspaper: “my grandfather’s photo was there with me during all my career in the Israeli security services; I show it my colleagues from the Israeli security community [to show] that my late grandfather has been behind everything I do to prevent another Holocaust”.<sup>9</sup>

One could argue that Dagan’s personal Holocaust memory mirrors the memories held by other Israeli offspring of Holocaust survivors. Navoth, Merhav and Halevey’s accounts read as Dagan’s memory represents what they felt for years but did not convey publicly. Most importantly, how did these memories inspired their professional aspirations? Dagan was openly using the photograph of his grandfather to implement and educate the Israeli military/intelligence communities about what he thought was the most important lesson of the Holocaust - never again for us. But, it seems that other Israeli

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, Halevey, 6 January, 2017. (second interview). Halevey refers to a photo that after 15 March 2015 become famous in Israel. In the centre of the photo (appendix three) is Ber Erlich Sloshtny, a Jewish prisoner in the Łuków ghetto, Poland, who was pictured kneeling, moments before he was shot by the Nazis’ Reserve Police Battalion 101. Sloshtny was the grandfather of the late tenth director of the IISO (2002–2011), Meir Dagan who publicly revealed this personal Holocaust memory in his speech during a rally in Tel Aviv during which he heavily criticised Benjamin Netanyahu’s administration regarding the Israeli occupation since the 1967 war (appendix four). [www.ynetnews.com/articles/html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/html) (accessed 11 April 2019). I approached Dagan several times between May 2015 to January 2016, to conduct an interview but his illness prevented it from taking place. Dagan passed away on 17 March 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Shimon Shiffer, “In the Name of the Grandfather”, *YnetNews*, 18 March 2016, [Hebrew], [www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4779921,00.html](http://www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4779921,00.html), (accessed 11 April 2019).



elites also find their ways to remember their family tragedies while undertaking their daily routine. Turning to other aspects of the operation in the Turkish border, Yossi Alpher, another IISO official also agreed to reflect on the geopolitical factor in these operations, giving a bit more input on the actual operation itself:

The main role of the IISO has been to use the peripheral countries in the Middle East (non-Arab) to help Jews in distress to flee. Therefore, Sudan, Iran, Turkey, Morocco, and ethnic minorities such as the Phalanges in Lebanon or Kurds, were all very helpful in these covert operations. From the point at which the Jews got into the borders of Turkey, for example, our [IISO's] job was basically finished. No one has any idea the amount of resources Israel's successive governments have devoted to these operations, in manpower, funds, covert connections.<sup>10</sup>

Based on Alpher's account, it is evident that Israel always needed to rely on the help of its regional allies, specifically non-Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. In the context of the Iranian revolution, Turkey's geopolitical position became even more strategically important to secure the operation with the Iranian and Syrian Jews. Lastly, the account of another IISO official should be incorporated into this section. Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir is a former senior officer in the IISO and the head of the IISO Station in Tehran during the Iranian revolution. He recalls in an oral interview:

During the 1960s and most of the 1970s we had great working relations with the TNIO and the Iranian intelligence. We had a routine meeting every six months in a different location. The agreement with the Turks had been that our IISO officials were stationed in the area of the Eastern border with Syria, using the outlet of Adana to help Syrian Jews flee. In 1978, once I had arrived in Iran as the head of the IISO station in Tehran, I, and all the other officials stationed there, were very busy with the deterioration and the forthcoming revolution. It was in the air. Among other groups, Khomeini's people published hard-line propaganda against the Iranian Jews. That had

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<sup>10</sup> Oral Interview with Yossi Alpher, 2 February, 2016, Ramat Hashron, Israel.

begun already in 1978. We [the IISO] saw that it was a slippery road [...] therefore we prepared an emergency rescue plan that offered Israelis or Jewish Iranians as safe a path as possible to flee.<sup>11</sup>

Tzafrir's detailed account provides a lucid description of how the agreement with the Turkish intelligence services was put into effect regarding the Syrian Jews in the Adana border crossing. Also, Tzafrir is able to communicate the state of emergency facing the Iranian Jews, which demonstrates that it was an immediate threat which the Israeli diplomats needed to 'trade' vis à vis the Armenian genocide. Set against the deterioration with the Iranians, this account emphasises once more the degree to which the geopolitical factor and Turkey's specific role in it, was immensely critical to the success of the operation, indeed, even more so than before.

Although this topic warrants in depth and careful study of its own, the oral histories enlighten the policy and its history. As Halevy notes, it is a policy that has been embedded into the country's national security institutions from the earliest years of nationhood. Halevy also highlights the impact of the tragedy of the Holocaust on Israel's grand strategy on this issue. The oral accounts of these senior IISO personnel also disclose the degree to which both Iran and Turkey had a critical role in these escape routes, through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but especially in the early 1980s. The changes in Iran in 1979 merely heightened Turkey's role in these operations and thus added further urgency to the state of Israeli-Turkish relations.

### **Israeli Diplomats, Israeli-Turkish Relations, and the Refugee Question**

Although the mission of protecting the Iranian and Syrian Jews was undertaken mainly by the IISO in the shadows, it still had possible effects on the diplomatic work of Israeli diplomats serving in Ankara and Istanbul. Understanding the disjunction between Israel's MFA and the IISO on these issue is important to grasp the argument here. Namely, while the IISO undertook these covert missions in the shadows, the MFA, which was in the front line of the Israeli diplomatic engagement with Turkey, had to evaluate how they might affect relations with Ankara.

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<sup>11</sup> Oral Interview with Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir, 26 July 2017, Ramat Hashron, Israel.

This section, therefore, now examines what the Israeli diplomats who were in active service in Ankara and Istanbul in the early 1980s actually knew about this issue and how it intersected with the events of 1982 conference. Eli Shaked, the former Israeli consul in Ankara and later in Istanbul (1980–1984), recalls:

I remember very well how I needed to sign the refugees' papers and hand them to our Turkish colleagues to sign them too. The Turks were more than cooperative about this issue, but very discreet too. It is hard for me to say if it was a humanitarian gesture, or if it was something else. The international media did not know anything about the Turkish policy which was kept covert. The covert operation for the refugees was quite extraordinary for the time, due to the problematic timing of the diplomatic crisis. Frankly though, I do not know what drove them [the Turks] to cooperate with us [Israeli MFA] so smoothly.<sup>12</sup>

Alon Liel, Israel's Chargé d'affaires in Ankara between 1981–1983, examines the impact of the Jewish refugees in the context of the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations:

The biggest surprise with the Turks at that point was the Iranian and Syrian Jews. The Turkish MFA was extremely generous with us on this. Every morning when I come to my office at the embassy, always there was something with the refugees. When the Jews were crossing the border from Iran, they had our [embassy phone number] which they received from the IISO officers. [...] I want to remind you that this was the time of the crisis (1980–1985), and the Turkish MFA did not want to speak to us [Israel MFA], but this was the only thing they agreed to do for us. They said: 'we do it as a humanitarian gesture; throughout our history we have saved Jews, and this has nothing to do to our relations with Israel'. To this end, it was very important to the Turks, however, to take any measure possible that the Jewish refugees will not continue to Israel, but to forward them to the United States. Therefore, the Turks always tried to isolate the Jews from us

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Shaked, 25 July 2017.

[the MFA officers] and to connect them with representatives of Jewish organisations.<sup>13</sup>

Both Shaked and Liel highlight their surprise at the Turkish gesture in relation to the Jewish refugees, especially in respect to its correlation with the crisis in bilateral diplomatic relations (1980–1985). Even though the Israeli diplomats did not receive details about the actual operation with the Jewish refugees, they did receive some hints that could help them assess that this was a serious matter to consider in their diplomatic engagements with the Turks. Moreover, it could be interpreted that helping those Jews represented a humanitarian gesture by Turkey towards Israel and the Jewish world, and indeed refugees more broadly, that could be leveraged in any diplomatic forum to counter the accusations of genocide against the Armenians. Furthermore, according to Liel's account—and this is an important nuance in the context of what comes in the next sections of the chapter—the Turks did help the Jews as a ‘humanitarian gesture’ and on the basis of their historical tradition, rather than as a way of helping Israel directly. Taking this approach could serve to help Turkey, not just to avoid criticism from the Arab world about directly helping Israel, but also to leverage its ‘humanitarian gesture’ vis à vis the Armenian genocide accusations; as some sort of proof that those who undertake ‘humanitarian gestures’ could not commit genocide against the Armenians. Of course, this assertion is far from convincing, but this was what the Turks were aiming to do.

### **Incorporating the Holocaust Myth into Turkey’s Foreign Policy**

As noted in the literature review, there is debate as to what extent Turkey did actually rescue Jews during the WWII. Nevertheless, successive Turkish governments have leveraged the treatment of the Turkish Jews in general for foreign policy ends. Specifically, this was used as counter argument against the Armenians’ claims of genocide. I should emphasise two observations: firstly, that the policy of rescuing refugees was not solely aimed at saving Jews, although Jews were indeed included in this treatment. Second, this was done in a passive manner. i.e. the Turkish border police

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, Liel, 24 July 2017.

‘looked the other way’ and did not stop the refugees and return them back to their countries. Still, as is evident in this chapter, as well as in the subsequent chapter on the USHMM, the Turkish MFA used these humanitarian gestures to pressure the Israeli MFA via the Turkish Jews and American Jewish organisations to approach both the conference steering committee and the USHMC committee urging them to omit the references to the Armenian genocide. This also gave Turkey the chance to show at least partial implementation of the 1975 Helsinki accord and the UN convention on the prevention of genocide which Turkey had ratified in March 1950.<sup>14</sup> This seems, therefore, to be a very useful strategy in so far as Turkey needed to demonstrate to Western powers its commitment to human rights and Western values in the context of the Armenian accusations of genocide.

It is with these diplomatic ambitions that successive Turkish governments highlighted the positive treatment of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the alleged rescue of the Jews during the WWII. Following this line of argument, the military government of 1980 used the arguments above together with the Turkish efforts to rescue the Syrian and Iranian Jews. All the above underpins the main argument here, that Israel, and subsequently Turkey, as Middle East regional powers, using the American Jews as an instrument to influence US policies on the Armenian genocide.

It should be noted, however, that the Turkish policy of the 1970s and 1980s was not an isolated policy to help only the Jews and Israel. The pattern suggested here is that Turkey was manipulating a broader policy to help refugees to enter into Turkey, among them Jews, to leverage them to pressure Israel and the American Jews, with respect to the memory of the Armenian genocide. Turkey’s ambassador in Israel 2009–2010, Oğuz Çelikkol, recalled:

We have been helping refugees to flee from their countries for many years now, that’s not a new thing, amongst them were Jews. We implement it into our foreign policy as a tradition since the Ottoman Empire period. It is a humanitarian gesture indeed; during the early 1980s we were helping

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<sup>14</sup> The 1948 UNGC was ratified by the Turkish parliament in 29 March 1950.

Iranian refugees who were fleeing from Khomeini's coup and we kept them in our borders safely.<sup>15</sup>

While for Çelikkol this policy comes across as a rather straightforward policy, this is not so obvious if we consider Turkey's selective approach to human rights. Undoubtedly, other countries, such as the US in respect to the Cambodian genocide and the UK in its former colonies such as Kenya, Malaya or Bangladesh, exhibited highly ambiguous attitudes to human rights in practice. So within this context, perhaps Turkey's selective approach to human rights is not especially remarkable. On the other hand, one can also argue that helping refugees to flee from their countries had been a policy associated with the Turks from the time of the Ottoman Empire to the 1980s and beyond, and that this was indeed something that Turkey could leverage against the Armenian claims of genocide. In an oral interview, Gabi Levy, the Israeli former ambassador in Ankara, assesses Turkey's foreign policy with respect to refugees throughout the years of the Turkish Republic:

Historically, if one examines Turkey's foreign policy of the 1970s and 1980s there is an element which one cannot disregard. Turkey throughout the short history of the Republic protects the weak and human rights. We see it even in recent years with the Syrian refugee crisis, which Turkey helped to rescue and spending quite a lot of funds on this issue. Therefore, I am not too surprised that Turkey helped the Jews to flee in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, we need to remember there was still hostility in Turkey towards the Arab nations who drove the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Even during the 1980 military coup that underpinned Turkey's secular heritage, the Turks still had a fundamental reticence about Syria and other Arab countries and thus could overlook Jews crossing its borders.<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, Çelikkol's and Levy's first-hand accounts verify that although Turkey had a tradition of helping refugees throughout the Ottoman Empire period and even later during the 1980s and to today, this was not done out of particular respect for the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, Çelikkol, 21 July 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Oral Interview with Gabi Levy, 3 February 2016, Yehud, Israel.

Jews, but rather as a matter of general humanitarian policy, as Çelikkol noted. If this was the intention of the Turkish MFA, then it served the diplomatic uses of human rights and Holocaust memory in Turkey's foreign policy well.

### **Confronting the Nazi Past? Manfred Paeffgen and the UNHCR**

Following on from the previous sections, this part of the chapter uncovers how Israeli diplomats were using the help of an unexpected source: Manfred Paeffgen, who served as the representative of the UNHCR at the time in Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Even though the archival record on Paeffgen's contribution to the issue of the refugees dates from a few months after the conference (October and November 1982), it nevertheless supports the narrative of the refugees and its importance to Israel as a national mission in those years and not as an ad hoc excuse set against the conference. Alon Liel, who had a close professional relationship with Paeffgen at that time, wrote in a declassified report to the MFA office in Jerusalem and to the IISO the following:

Paeffgen is a German citizen about 40 years old, married to an Italian woman, has a son who is six years old. He initiated the contact with me and I am under the strong opinion that he is a highly trustworthy individual, and most importantly he is very sympathetic to our problem.<sup>18</sup>

In an oral account Liel further elaborates on his relations with Paeffgen, providing more texture and background about their professional engagements:

More generally, Paeffgen was working as UNHCR, but specifically, he was very keen to help us. Paeffgen was a German citizen, second generation to the Holocaust, which motivated him to help us, more than he was willing

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<sup>17</sup> Manfred Paeffgen served as UNHCR in the Philippines, 1979–1981, Turkey, 1981–1985, Italy, 1985–1986, Netherlands, 1986–1991. Currently, (2017), Paeffgen lives in Cologne, Germany. He is retired from his work with the UN, and lost his ability to speak because of a medical condition. After long attempts to approach him for an oral interview, on 17 October 2016 I had an e-mail exchange with his son Aldo Paeffgen, and a phone conversation with his wife Manuela Paeffgen, both of whom informed me that it will be impossible to meet Manfred for an interview due to his current medical condition. See corresponding emails Ben Aharon to Paeffgen, 17–18 October 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Ankara to MFA Jerusalem, re; Paeffgen, 4 November 1982, MFA/ISA/00033BZ/8402/8.

to help others. Specifically, every nugget of information he received about Jewish refugees, he delivered directly to me. One also needs to remember that Paeffgen received great trust from the Turkish authorities as a German citizen, and it was very helpful because they [the Turks] let him work and did not disturb his help to us [Israel and the Jews].<sup>19</sup>

Liel provides essential context to what we know about Paeffgen. However, there are no available records regarding Paeffgen's family history during WWII, and thus his commitment to saving Jews and helping the MFA remains contested, much like German historians who advocated for the uniqueness claim. As noted in the literature review, Dan Diner, among others, argued that questions of guilt drove (West) German historians to support the uniqueness assertion.<sup>20</sup> Likely, this argument is applicable here as well. Paeffgen was motivated to help Liel and MFA based on feelings of shame and guilt as a member of the second-generation on the perpetrators' side.

In a telegram to the MFA in Jerusalem, Liel noted his recent meeting with Paeffgen and their conversation concerning developments in Turkey's foreign policy regarding refugees from Iran:

Paeffgen noted to me in our previous meeting that, according to his information, Iran's government has been pressuring Turkey's MFA to return Iranian refugees who are fleeing into Turkey. [...] According to Paeffgen, the Turkish border guards are not too alert, and therefore, many refugees who dream of getting to Europe manage it quite fast thorough Turkey. At this point, if too many Iranian refugees will try to cross the borders, then Turkey will have to take drastic measures and return the refugees back to Iran. [...] According to Paeffgen, the issue is very topical and bothers the Turks. To this end, Paeffgen promised me that he is very much on guard on this for us and asked me to inform him in detail about any acute problem we have so he can help us with anything he can.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Interview, Liel, 24 July 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable Studies*, 219.

<sup>21</sup> Ankara to MFA Jerusalem, re: Iranian Refugees, 21 October 1982, ISA/MFA/00033BZ/8402/8.



The document describing the meeting between Paeffgen and Liel uncovers Turkey's general limitations with the refugee issue, with no specific reference to the Iranian Jews. It reveals that Turkey was indeed experiencing more general problems with refugees, probably Jews among them. This somehow contradicts Turkey's narrative from the previous section concerning Turkey's specific 'humanitarian gesture to Jews in their long history' which they emphasised to Liel. More accurately, Turkey did not make any special humanitarian gesture to Jews but rather to Iranian refugees, Jews amongst them. Furthermore, we can learn from this telegram that Paeffgen was indeed working behind the scenes for Israel and Jews, giving careful attention to any refugee who was in danger. As Liel noted in his oral account, this could have been related to the fact that Paeffgen was a German citizen.

Moving further, and with relation to the Jewish refugee problem, Liel is further notifying the IISO officials and MFA what he thinks about how best to make use of Paeffgen's special services regarding this matter:

I think that we should not ask Paeffgen to disclose any information we give him about who is helping the Jews to flee, and it is not because I think he will disclose this sensitive information away to the Turks. It is better for us [Israel] that if Paeffgen will continue to help the Jews discreetly as part of his job, e.g. refugees who are running for their lives and who are under a great deal of danger. When there are special cases that the Turks are returning Jews to their home country, it is better to send that information to him [Paeffgen], because in these matters he can interfere by using his status as the UNHCR.<sup>22</sup>

Liel's account demonstrates that Turkey's humanitarian acceptance of refugees was not an open-ended commitment: in some cases Jews were returned to their home country even though these Jews were in real distress. Quite clearly, relying on Liel's document, the threat to Jews was real. Although it seems that Turkey was conducting a firm policy that might not be easily changed, there were cases, as noted in Liel account, when Jews were sent back to their home country. This provides some evidence that the Israeli MFA

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<sup>22</sup> Paeffgen, ISA, MFA, 8402/8.

had reasonable grounds to suspect that if the Armenian genocide had been included in the conference programme this could have been enough to provoke Turkey to make good on its implied threat to send the Jewish refugees back to their home countries.

### **Paeffgen and the American Jewish Organisations**

In another document, from a few days later, Paeffgen was abroad and could not provide his usual help to the Israeli embassy in Ankara with respect to the Jewish refugees. To recap from the second chapter of the thesis, given that Israeli-Turkish relations were basically frozen during 1982, the American Jews, specifically the ADL and WJC, sought to have an overview of the Middle East and thus of the Jewish communities in distress. Liel writes the following to the IISO and the MFA office in Jerusalem:

Paeffgen is currently in Europe and will be back in Turkey only this weekend; if we can wait until he will back to discuss the issue 'Hacimi Peridon', then I will bring this to his attention. However, an alternative could be, if this is such an urgent matter, to approach the Turks via the American ambassador. The best thing to do is that one of the Jewish American organisations can issue an urgent telegram with all the details to the American embassy in Ankara so that the American ambassador will not have to use the information he obtained from us [MFA].<sup>23</sup>

We can learn two things from this document: firstly, it uncovers a bit more about the importance of Paeffgen to the Israeli operation in respect to the refugees as the first port of call for Israel in Turkey when things did not go smoothly. We know by now that the suspended relations between Ankara and Jerusalem could be bridged only by sub-state actors, with Paeffgen's services being the primary source. In other words, if Paeffgen was not available at a specific moment, the plan 'b' was to approach the Turks via the American Jewish organisations and US ambassador in Ankara, as Liel suggested. This fits well with what we learnt in the previous three chapters of the thesis (in respect to

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<sup>23</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem and the IISO, re: Iranian Refugees, 24 October 1982, ISA/MFA/00033BZ/8402/8. Liel verified that 'Hacimi Peridon' was a Jewish Iranian refugee who needed Israel's embassy help to cross the border into Turkey. Interview, Liel, 24 July 2017.

the crisis in Israeli-Turkish relations, ASALA), and it also fits with Israeli diplomats not being in a position to contact the highest ranks of Turkey's MFA with respect to urgent refugee matters.

So far, it is clear that the Turks were applying some contrasting principles with regards to relations with Israel; as the Turks argued, they were helping Jews as a humanitarian gesture in line with the long Ottoman/Turkish history in respect to the Sephardic Jews. Of course, the Holocaust myth of rescue is not a standalone policy, but rather a point of reference that seemingly proves Turkey's commitment to saving Jews in distress.

Simultaneously, the Turks made some serious efforts that Jewish refugees would not be forwarded to Israel, but to the US. This was clearly done to appease the oil-supplying Arab countries, who were pressuring Turkey to boycott Israel after the enactment of the Jerusalem law (1980), as the first chapter of the thesis showed. This represented the Turkish MFA's attempt to prove that their actions were properly for the sake of the Jews per se and not for the sake of Israeli-Turkish relations.

Quite by contrast to this clear message above, as the records of the Liel-Paeffgen meetings show, Turkey's foreign policy concerning the refugees, specifically in the Iranian eastern border, was a broad-scope policy undertaken by Turkey vis à vis refugee more generally. More precisely, indeed, it was not for the sake of Israeli-Turkish relations, rather, it was a humanitarian gesture to all refugees, Jews among them. Now, in relation to the 1982 conference, all of the above elusive interpretations and contrasting principles in respect to Turkey's geopolitical position in the Middle East worked for Turkey as leverage with Israel and the American and Turkish Jewish elite to pressure the conference organisers.

### **Interfering in the 1982 Conference (April – June 1982)**

The idea of launching a special academic conference in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies in the early 1980s was a fresh yet controversial one. Side by side with the issue of Jewish refugees, the above alone played a role in helping the Israeli MFA to pressure international scholars not to attend the conference in Jerusalem on the basis that it risked undermining the hierarchy of victimhood. The Turkish diplomats

recognised that the uniqueness aspect was crucial to the identity politics of American Jews and therefore pressured them to neglect the Armenian genocide. These issues are important here because they relate also to the subsequent chapter when the politics of the USHMM will be the focus of attention.

With this line of argument, it is important to note that—from a global Cold War Armenian diaspora perspective and the memory of the Armenian genocide—up to that point in time (1982), there had been no academic initiatives to study the Armenian genocide in such an international academic forum. Thus, just including papers on the Armenian genocide in such a pioneering event was a major achievement for the Western Armenian diaspora community. Simultaneously, however, the political violence of ASALA, who were assassinating Turkish diplomats to remind the world about the forgotten 1915 genocide, drew some negative attention of its own, as chapter three has demonstrated.

At first glance, although it is somewhat stating the obvious, the venue of the conference was disturbing to Turkey for the obvious reason that Israel and Jerusalem are not just another city and country in the world in relation to genocide. Nevertheless, the more one taps into the special circumstances discussed in this chapter and in the thesis, it casts new light upon what drove the Turkish diplomats to leverage the Armenian genocide panels in the conference.

Turning back to the conference, Yad Vashem officially sponsored the event, and many international scholars had confirmed their attendance. The organisers also received fellowships and grants from the funds of Holocaust survivors, and it looked like it would be a promising event.<sup>24</sup> Israel Charny claims that a few months before the conference, Wiesel, Davidson and himself started to receive messages from various directions such as Israel's MFA, the Turkish Jewish elite, and American Jewish organisations urging them to remove the Armenian genocide papers from the conference agenda.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Yad Vashem, the Israeli state institution, withdrew

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<sup>24</sup> See Israel W. Charny, "Pressures on Genocide Conference," *The Jerusalem Post*, (29 August 1982).

<sup>25</sup> For more about the Armenian Genocide contributors to this conference see: Charny et al., *The Book of the International Conference*; Ben Aharon, "A Unique Denial," 464.

its support from the event.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the conference was moved from its original venue, Jerusalem, to Tel Aviv. The conference did take place, however, but in a different academic setting and mainly with a local audience.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, after this short summary, is what comes next in terms of uncovering some of the efforts undertaken by the Israeli diplomatic staff to change the nature of the conference so that Israel's/Jewish interests with Turkey would not be harmed.

### *The WJC*

As noted in the first chapter of the thesis, since Israeli-Turkish relations were in decline in December 1980, both Turkey and Israel used the American Jewish organisation, namely the WJC, to bypass the Turkish boycott of Israel.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, after the first round of meetings held in April 1981 by the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, Kamuran Gürün, with Jewish organisations worldwide, a year later (1 April 1982), Gürün held a second round of meetings with Jewish leaders in New York City. Approximately two months before the conference, Gürün approached the American Jewish leadership directly regarding the looming conference. That Gürün, the Turkish expert on the Armenian genocide, was chosen once again (as in 1981) to meet the Jewish leadership, reveals the importance of the Armenian issue to the Turks.

The issue of the conference makes its first appearance in an undated document (although apparently written during early April 1982) sent from the Israeli consul in New York to Jerusalem and Ankara. The document summarises Gürün's meeting with the Jewish elite which focused, among other things, on the Armenian issue and the conference. The Israeli consul, Uri Bar Nar, noted in his document:

In the meeting, Gürün noted that the Jewish leadership that Turkey has been interested in engaging with American Jewish organisations to help improve Turkey's reputation in the US. In response, the Jewish elite argued that

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<sup>26</sup> Charny, "Pressures on Genocide Conference,"; see also Charny's oral account telling more about this in Ben Aharon, "A Unique Denial," 464.

<sup>27</sup> Bali, *Model Citizens of the State*, 276.

<sup>28</sup> See also Jerusalem to Washington DC, re: Assessment of Current Bilateral Relations with Turkey and Background information to the Visit of the American Secretary of State in Turkey, 10 December 1981, ISA/MFA/D00038/ 8409/12.

Turkey should upgrade its relations with Israel as a trade-off for their help with Turkey's reputation. Gürün then asserted that, from a practical point of view, Turkey's had been conducting good relations with Israel, in which both countries share a common interest as strong Middle Eastern countries which can face the Soviet threat together. [...] at this point Gürün informed his listeners that Turkey is very much concerned about a Holocaust conference in which the steering committee is planning to include lectures on the Armenian issue. Gürün noted that Turkey was convinced that this conference proves a hostile position towards Turkey and asked the Jewish elite to put forth its powerful influence to make Israel drop the Armenian issue from the agenda. Furthermore, the Jewish elite were very much under the impression that the Turks were pessimistic about whether Israel could change the conference content. Could you (MFA) telegram us, on which conference are we talking about? Who is on the steering committee? And, do you think we can impact it whatsoever?<sup>29</sup>

First and foremost, it seems that although Gürün was talking to the American Jewish elite, he was not directly addressing his listeners at all, but mostly talking to Israel and the Israeli MFA via the Jewish elite. Furthermore, Gürün made sure before getting to the crucial point of the conference that his Jewish-American audience would be pleased with his somewhat optimistic assessment of Israeli-Turkish relations. As Gürün noted, the relations were in practice good, and not in a crisis at all, since both countries had some very broad shared regional interests. Then, Gürün gave his listeners the impression that Turkey had very low expectations from Israel regarding the Armenian issue, signalling to Israel via the American Jews that this was their opportunity to score diplomatic wins and further asking the Jewish elite to put their thoughts into helping the Turks to get Israel's attention on the Armenian issue and the conference. From Bar Nar's notes, one can understand that even though the Israeli diplomats did not know much about the content of the conference, they were willing to address the issue of the conference in order to make the Turks happy about the Armenian issue in the hope of

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<sup>29</sup> New York to Jerusalem, re: Turkey, April 1982, ISA/MFA/TG00030/8401, 3.

provoking a positive turn in Israeli-Turkish relations.

### **Stimulating Armenian Terrorism: One Category for the Turks and the Nazis?**

On 9 April 1982, Alon Liel was invited to an urgent meeting in the Turkish MFA regarding the conference. As Liel reported to Jerusalem and New York, the meeting was held in the presence of Ömer Engin Lütem. As recalled from the first chapter after the military coup Lütem established the anti-Armenian terror research department in the Turkish MFA. As Liel reported in his urgent telegram:

In the message Lütem read to me, he noted that launching an academic conference, which will include discussions regarding the ‘events of 1915’ in the boundaries of the state of Israel, means an Israeli identification with the Armenians’ stance. Under any circumstances Turkey cannot accept that in an academic conference held in Israeli jurisdiction it will be put in one category with Nazi Germany. This is even more surprising given the fact that Turkey has saved Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany. At the end of the message, it was mentioned that if the Armenian issue were to be included in the conference then there would be a severe influence on Israeli-Turkish relations. I [Liel] referred Lütem to our fruitful efforts in Washington with respect to the discussions regarding the USHMM exhibition. At this point, another Turkish diplomat walked into the meeting holding a telegram reporting an assassination of another Turkish diplomat. I [Liel] immediately offered my condolences, and Lütem used it to point out that a conference such as the one planned in Israel could stimulate the Armenian terrorism which was reasonable for these attacks.<sup>30</sup>

Liel’s urgent telegram tells a story that seems to capture the anxieties of Turkey’s MFA about the looming conference. The written message Lütem read to Liel conveyed a few clear threats which need to be contextualised properly with the earlier chapters. From

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<sup>30</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem and New York, re: The Holocaust Conference, 9 April 1982, ISA/MFA/000368I/2672, 1–2

Turkey's point of view, the conference encouraged Armenian terrorism, and even worse, an identification between the Turks and the Nazis as perpetrators of genocide, which would represent a clear threat to Israeli-Turkish relations. At that point in time, any further deterioration would mean a complete breakdown in the countries' relations. Liel's response regarding the USHMM connects three overlapping Armenian activities each of which were highly sensitive for the Turks in 1982. In particular, this document connects the subject matter of three chapters of this thesis, revealing how each of the Armenian-related problems, and their combination, shaped Israel's policy.

### **Pressuring the Conference Steering Committee and Charny's Meeting with Vassid**

In the following weeks, after the meeting held between Gürün and the American Jewish leadership that launched the anti-conference campaign, the telegram by Bar-Ner showed how things moved from words to actions. Specifically, the Israeli MFA and the Turkish Jewish elite, started examining the ways in which they could pressure the steering committee members Elie Wiesel, Israel Charny and Shamai Davidson. An anonymous document dated 17 May 1982 reveals step-by-step what measures were taken to pressure the conference organisers. My 2015 article discussed Israel Charny's oral account of these events, which was the only available account at the time.<sup>31</sup> In this section, since the current document has since been declassified, some missing parts are put into place and other parts such as the Charny-Vassid meeting in Tel Aviv are verified and analysed in more detail.

The following is a summary of the letter written by an anonymous MFA official to Shmuel Divon, at the time the deputy Director General of the Israeli MFA: On Tuesday 11 May [1982], Jeck Vassid, (a Turkish Jewish lawyer and the president of the Turkish Jewish community), met with Israel Charny. Vassid explained to Charny the positive role the Turkish Jews had played over the years in rescuing Jews [referring to transit immigrants]. Vassid gave Charny three alternative options: firstly, to completely cancel

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<sup>31</sup> Ben Aharon, "A Unique Denial," 646–47.



the conference; secondly, to remove the Armenian papers from it; thirdly, to transfer the conference to another country. Charny received the message from Vassid in a good spirit and said that he was willing to wait for the final ruling of the conference board of directors. Furthermore, Charny made a remark that \$40,000 had already been spent on the preparations.<sup>32</sup>

The meeting between Vassid and Charny confirms that the Jews in Turkey hinted as to their essential role in the rescue chain for Jewish refugees. The document also outlines the options that were given to Charny and the other members of the steering committee. The fact that there was another (at least one more) option on the table, which could have been considered as a reasonable alternative for the committee (the third option) could have made the pressure on the committee seem more moderate than it was. In the following pages of the letter there was a brief note on what happened next:

On the 13 May—two days later after the Vassid-Charny meeting—a telegram was received in the office of the Israeli consul in New York (Bar Ner in the previous document), which stated that Elie Wiesel (from the steering committee), would talk to Charny on 13 May and would ask him to cancel the conference without giving any promise as to whether it would take place in the future in another venue or alternative date. The consul agreed to this option, and indicated that a way should be found to cover the funds already spent by the steering committee (\$40,000). [...] Furthermore, on the same day (13 May) Wiesel talked to Charny. The latter made threats that the conference board of directors would condemn Israel if it attempted to proceed with removing the Armenian genocide panels from the conference. At this point, Wiesel noted to the Consul in New York (Bar Ner), that he is in favour of cancelling the conference if the funds already spent will be returned. Charny phoned Wiesel again and invited him to Jerusalem to speak with the Prime Minister [Menachem Begin] on the negative impacts of cancelling the conference versus cancelling the

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<sup>32</sup> “Holocaust and Genocide Conference,” 17 May 1982, MFA/ISA/ D00038, 1.

Armenian papers in the conference. Wiesel responded that he cannot fly to Israel at this point, but is willing to speak on the phone with the Prime Minister Begin or with Yechiel Kadishai [Begin's personal assistant and Chief of Staff] or to receive a message from Prime Minister Begin through the Israeli consul in New York.<sup>33</sup>

The document casts new light on the affair by telling us how high up consideration of the conference of 1982, and the Armenian papers issue, had reached. Clearly, beyond the issue of the conference or the Armenian genocide papers, inviting Wiesel to Jerusalem to meet Prime Minister Begin, a Holocaust survivor himself, and the Israeli Prime Minister who asked the IISO director in 1977 to in his notable request 'bring me the Ethiopian Jews', was an indication of the major importance attached to the issue.<sup>34</sup> Although we cannot verify this empirically, because the meeting did not take place, arguably, Begin's high sensitivity to Jewish refugees in distress, and his willingness to maintain the Jewish victims' unique voice, would have driven Prime Minister Begin to convince Wiesel to drop the Armenian victims' voices from the conference, as it was bad for several key Israeli/Jewish interests, transit immigrants among them. Furthermore, Begin, as the Prime Minister who was in office while the Jerusalem Law of 1980 was legislated in the Knesset and who would have known the recourses and countless efforts to court Turkey during those years by his MFA, understood that the slippery slope towards the point of complete breakdown was quite close. Ultimately, from all the three options listed above, none was chosen. The conference did take place in Israel, but not in Jerusalem as planned. The conference was moved to a smaller venue in Tel Aviv and some Armenian genocide papers were still included in the revised programme.<sup>35</sup> That said, the scholarly impact of the smaller event suffered from the absence of leading scholars who had cancelled their attendance due to MFA pressure, thus reducing the significance of the presentation of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup> In 1977 after winning the Israeli election the phrase was coined by Begin who asked from the IISO director to bring the Jews of Ethiopia home (to Israel). There is substantial research gap on this issue, but for a bit more on this see, Gad Shimron, *Bring Me the Ethiopian Jews* [in Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Am Israel Hed Arzi Publications, 1998); Ofer Aderet, "Remembering Zimna Berhani, the Mossad Operative Who Risked His Life for Ethiopian Jewry", *Haaretz*, 1 March 2015; [www.haaretz.com/premium-the-mossad-operative-who-risked-his-life-for-ethiopian-jews-1.5330330](http://www.haaretz.com/premium-the-mossad-operative-who-risked-his-life-for-ethiopian-jews-1.5330330) (accessed 17 February 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Israel W. Charny, et al., eds., "The Book of the International Conference".

Armenian account.

The issue of methodological fragmentation should be noted once again with respect to the ISA archival records. In addition to the missing documentation from the IISO about its rescue missions, or the fragmented documentation which reports the IISO activities to MFA, there is another issue, namely a void from June to late October 1982 where there were no archival records on the refugee issue in MFA documents. Possibly, there was no activity in this regard during these months, but it is more likely that these months' records remain classified. This, however, does not undermine the thesis of the links between the refugee problem and the conference. In a document that was sent from the MFA in Jerusalem to the Israeli Embassy in Ankara, dated 1 June 1982, and signed by Moshe Kamhi, the Director General of the Israeli MFA, I found further evidence to offer a new explanation as to why Israel was so eager to help the Turks to subvert this conference:

Herewith the copy from an article published in the 19<sup>th</sup> issue of the Journal 'Newsview'. Please make sure that this issue will not be delivered to Ankara since it includes a disturbing article mentioning the Armenian issue. This publication could be nothing but a deadly bomb to what is left of our bilateral relations with Turkey and even worse, it will harm and backfire to the transit immigrants. For the same reason of the Armenian issue we are currently investing incredible efforts—in which the Ministerial Committee on National Security Affairs [and Prime Minister Begin] are highly involved—to cancel the Holocaust and genocide Studies conference which is supposed to be taking place in Israel and includes Armenian lecturers on their issue. Publishing such an article in a journal issued by the MFA would have put these efforts to a complete waste. The Turks will never accept the poor assertion that we [MFA] are not responsible for this publication since it is our journal and is published by the Israeli MFA.<sup>36</sup>

This document clearly uncovers a serious mistake which would have led to a much

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<sup>36</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, "Newsview", 1 June 1982, MFA/ISA/TJ00030/84013; Israeli MFA's official diplomatic Journal entitled: *Newsview: The News Journal of Israel* which was published monthly at the time to Israeli embassies worldwide.

deeper crisis with the Turks. Publishing an article about the Armenian genocide in the official journal of the Israeli MFA could have indeed worsened relations between Ankara and Jerusalem. Even far worse than that, however, it could have severely harmed the transit immigrants. It not only seems that the MFA did not want to take any chances at that point, but also that it had anxieties that any mention of the Armenians could draw negative attention from the Turks that could harm the operation. In another document, dated 10 June 1982 the Israeli consul in Ankara, Avner Arazi, reported to Jerusalem regarding the content of a meeting between senior members of, Jewish Turkish community and Mordo Denar and Kamuran Gürün, Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister:

The Turkish Chief of the General Staff of Turkey (1980–1989), Kenan Evren adopted Gürün's report about his meetings with the Jewish organisations in New York. As a result, Evren asked the Turkish ambassador to the UN and in Washington if it would be possible to meet the Jewish organisations. Gürün also asked Denar to report that the Turkish MFA greatly appreciated the efforts undertaken by the Israeli diplomats regarding the conference.<sup>37</sup>

This document demonstrates the mixed signals the Turkish MFA was sending regarding the Armenians. On the one hand, there were no signs of normalisation in relations, with contact still being managed via the American Jewish organisations; on the other hand, Turkey was willing to acknowledge the efforts by the Israeli diplomats regarding the conference. The pro-Turkish faction in the Israeli MFA could feel that these efforts to woo Ankara were bearing some fruit. Delivering this message of appreciation was critical to the further Israeli efforts on the Armenian front, which was significant to Evran and the Turkish elite. Nonetheless, relations continued to be suspended. Slightly later, on 21 June 1982, Arazi notes that the conference was still taking a lot of attention:

It seems that, despite the negative attention we [MFA] received from the Israeli press and the world, reducing the conference to a minimum is something that could only help to rebuild the trust with the Turks. Positive

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<sup>37</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: Kamuran Gürün, 10 June 1982, MFA/ISA/TJ00030/390.

signs in this direction are coming from the Turks who have invited our Chargé d'affaires [Liel] to the Turkish MFA for a few meetings in the previous two weeks which were undertaken in a positive tone. The extreme efforts we have put forth recently in respect to the conference has proven to the Turks our goodwill in this issue. Furthermore, as I [Arazi] understand it, the main reason for our intensive efforts to stop the conference was the issue of the Jewish refugees fleeing from Iran and Syria. Vassid, who met with Charny in Tel Aviv, used that argument above all the others he prepared out of his feeling of great responsibility to the Jewish brothers. As an individual [Arazi] who knows the Turkish tradition of protecting refugees in general, it is hard to imagine that Turkey would have done something so dreadful as sending back the Jews to the Iranian and Syrian side of the borders specifically in a period in which Turkey is making great efforts to improve its international reputation.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, the document by Arazi pieces together all the important points of this chapter. This was not so much that Turkey would have sent back the Jewish refugees from Iran and Syria if the Armenian genocide papers would have been included in the conference, although that could have been a reasonable possibility. As we know so far from the previous chapters of the thesis, however, and the evidence regarding the delicate situation between Israel and Turkey, Jerusalem could indeed not afford another escalation with Ankara since this would have brought relations and the situation with the Jewish refugees to a bitter end. As Arazi noted above, this way Turkey could also maintain its humanitarian gesture towards Jews. Israel, on its behalf, as one can easily detect from Arazi's tone in his account, felt that it had satisfied the Turks beyond any doubt with relation to the Armenian genocide papers, thus proving that both Israel and Turkey gained diplomatic leverage thanks to the initial inclusion of Armenian genocide papers in the conference.

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<sup>38</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: "Holocaust Conference, Interim Assessments", 17 June 1982, ISA/TG00030/8401/3;

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Israel's wish to protect the Jewish refugees drove the Israeli MFA, in collaboration with Jewish American organisations and the Jewish Turkish elite, to pressure the steering committee of the 1982 conference to remove the Armenian genocide panels from the conference agenda. This chapter serves as a case study which, although limited to the short period of the first few months of 1982, is part of the greater sum of the thesis. The totality of the evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that Israel's MFA pressured the conference steering committee regarding the Armenian genocide, and that this was driven by the MFA's grand strategy to maintain Turkey as a valuable strategic ally in the context of late Cold War uncertainty. Furthermore, Jerusalem was also cognisant of Turkey's important role in the region as an escape route for Iranian and Syrian Jews.

Halevy, Navoth and Merhav discussed the impact of the Holocaust memory culture and the diplomacy of survivors. Without being able to measure the impact precisely, the tragic memory of the Holocaust was 'in the air' as Merhav put it. Therefore, the impression is that for the first generation Holocaust survivors who worked in the IISO, as well as the second generation IISO and MFA officials, preventing another Holocaust was fundamental to their mission. Together with the geopolitical factor, the Iranian revolution and Turkey's willingness to give Israel a greater role during this period, the full context within which Israel's MFA put pressure on the conference organisers becomes evident.

As Kamahi's document about the MFA official journal illustrates clearly, from Israel's national security point of view, the critical national interest in rescuing those Jews was preserved when the MFA/American Turkish Jewish elite interfered in the content of the conference to remove the Armenian papers. Furthermore, as the oral accounts of the IISO officials showed, along with the document of the Charny-Vassid meeting, and the invitation sent to Wiesel to meet Prime Minister Begin in Jerusalem, the conference was considered to be a serious threat to Israeli-Turkish relations and the Jewish refugees operation.

All the above feeds neatly into the first part of the thesis, specifically in the context of the later Cold War and changing alliances in the Middle East. The challenges posed by Jewish refugees in the Middle East are an important element in the overall set

of circumstances that this thesis investigates. Specifically, after the 1979 Iranian revolution, Israel could not afford to lose Turkey as an asset, not just because the country was vital to the regional endeavour to fight Soviet-sponsored terror, as the previous chapter showed, but also to secure an escape route for Iranian and Syrian Jews.

In respect to the 1982 conference, it can be understood that, from a Turkish point of view, Ankara achieved diplomatic gains in two areas: firstly, they managed to interfere in an academic conference to prevent the Armenian genocide narrative from being fully presented in the panels and being fully integrated with the Holocaust. i.e. even though the conference did take place in Tel Aviv as noted, after all it was done in a local Israeli academic setting (with the attendance of more local Israeli scholars). The Turks seemed to have managed to limit the international exposure that was afforded to the work of Armenian scholars, after many international scholars cancelled their attendance due to MFA pressure. This was not a minor achievement, given that these types of international forums tend to initiate further academic collaboration. Most importantly, on the diplomatic side, the Turks had secured the commitment of Israel, and the Jewish leadership in Turkey and in the US, to support the Turkish narrative of the events of 1915. This was a breakthrough for the Turks which would be used against all the different sub-problems arising from the memory of Armenians during the 1980s: terrorism which was at its peak in 1982/3, and, as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, with respect to the USHMM and the European Parliament/American congress resolutions.

All in all, this chapter must be connected to the previous chapter which examined how ASALA acted as a means for rapprochement between Ankara and Jerusalem. Together, both ASALA and the 1982 conference have shown that, although the Turkish military elite and MFA did not change their formal position regarding Israel, and did not commit to any normalisation in 1982, Israel could still be seen as a useful ally for Turkey. Most importantly, Kamuran Gürün, Turkey's pivot man on the 'Armenian question' was impressed by the Israeli diplomats' and Jewish organisations' commitment to align with Turkey's campaign against the Armenians, and this led to Gürün's suggestion of the need to establish a shared counter-terrorism forum in early 1986. In combination with other factors such as Özal's pro-Western orientation, the above led to the gradual process of normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations, which is

the focal point of the next and final part of the thesis set against the Armenian genocide resolutions and the exhibition at the USHMM.



**PART IV:**  
**THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE BETWEEN**  
**WASHINGTON AND STRASBOURG**

# Chapter 7

## **The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Ethnic Lobbying and the Contested Memories of the Armenian Genocide**

### **Introduction**

This fifth chapter examines the federal initiative to establish the USHMM between 1978 and 1988. The early years of the project featured attempts by Armenian Americans to include the contested memories of the Armenian genocide in the museum exhibition. The chapter focuses on this initiative during the early 1980s, side-by-side with deteriorating relations between Israel and Turkey. In this chapter, I argue that the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations and the importance of Turkey as a Cold War ally for both the US and Israel drove the Israeli diplomats and Jewish American organisations to pressure the USHMC not to include references to the Armenian genocide within the memorial. Specifically, by creating an opposition within the memorial council the Israeli MFA hoped to persuade the USHMC to withdraw from its initial commitment to include the Armenian genocide of 1915 in the museum narrative. As with the 1982 conference, the Turkish MFA used the argument that the references to the ‘alleged’ Armenian genocide could reduce the significance of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This was a compelling argument for second-generation Holocaust survivors who were influenced by the Israeli Holocaust memory culture and their shared community-based narrative of suffering.

To recap, the USHMM was launched as a federal project by US President Jimmy Carter on 1 November 1978, as an American-based memorial primarily aimed at commemorating the Nazi crimes perpetrated against the European Jews.<sup>1</sup> Carter also

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<sup>1</sup> For the full sequence of the events that established the memorial commission see [www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/presidents-commission](http://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum/presidents-commission) (accessed 4 March, 2018); Wiesel to Carter, 27 September, 1979, in *Report to the President: President's Commission on the Holocaust* (Reprinted by the USHMM, Washington, DC, 1999), i–vi; [www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050707-pres-commission-79.pdf](http://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050707-pres-commission-79.pdf) see also Bali, *Model Citizens*, 252–75.

sought to foster an American foreign policy agenda as a promoter of human rights and the 1975 Helsinki Accords even though, ironically, it was not until a decade later during November 1988, late in the Reagan administration—when the Cold War had come to its closing moments—that the US ratified the 1948 UNGC.<sup>2</sup> One of the most fundamental problems with the prospective project was that it provoked a major dispute concerning who should be regarded as victims of the Nazi regime.<sup>3</sup> Was it only Jews, or should non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime, such as gypsies, homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses and the disabled, be included in the exhibition narrative? This point of controversy also fostered the wider debate of whether the memorial should include victims of other genocides, as part of an attempt to prevent future genocides.

Apart from these heated debates, essentially regarding a hierarchy of victimhood, the USHMM was facing a second and interconnected problem. As the work by Moses on the Canadian Museum of Human Rights has emphasised, in the case of the US, and as a federal initiative, the museum commission demanded that the USHMM be built on the federal ground of the National Mall in the US capital, Washington DC.<sup>4</sup> That was, however, the only federal contribution to the project. The remaining funds of up to \$100 million were to be donated mainly by the American public under the heading of the federal initiative 'campaign to remember'. This created a golden opportunity for many non-Jewish victim organisations, as well as allied governments via their local diaspora groups, to influence the concept of the memorial by making a financial contribution or other valuable donations.<sup>5</sup>

The Armenian-American community under the leadership of George Deukmejian, the 35<sup>th</sup> governor of California (1983–1991), appointed Set Momjian as

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Carter signed the bill of order 12093 on 1 November 1978, the President's Commission on the Holocaust, see *Report to the President*, 20.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the ratification of the 1948 UNGC by Ronald Reagan: Steven V. Roberts, "Reagan Signs Bill Ratifying U.N. Genocide Pact" *New York Times*, 5 November 1988. [www.nytimes.com/1988/11/05/reagan-signs-bill-ratifying-un-genocide-pact.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/05/reagan-signs-bill-ratifying-un-genocide-pact.html) (accessed 14 February, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> As a result of this agenda, the planning committee decided to include a section in the memorial, 'the living memorial' which focuses on genocide prevention. For more on this see: Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Moses, "The Canadian Museum," 215–38.

<sup>5</sup> Eder, *Holocaust Angst*.

the Armenian representative to the museum council.<sup>6</sup> Momjian promised to contribute \$1 million to the project on behalf of the American-Armenian community.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter, Californian-based American-Armenians donated \$3 million US dollars to the prospective memorial, arguably so as to be able in a later phase to pressure USHMC to include the Armenian account of the 1915 genocide in the museum narrative. This possibility became a reality on 4 August 1983 when the USHMM decided after emotive discussion to include the 1915 genocide in the prospective memorial narrative.

Set against this initiative, Israeli diplomats, with the help of Jewish-American organisations and the Turkish-Jewish elite, sought to use two arguments to pressure the USHMC members to withdraw from the Armenian commitment. First, it was argued that including the Armenian genocide in the Jewish museum would significantly reduce the singularity of the Jewish genocide as a unique event and thus the substance of the Jewish project would potentially be lost. Instead of being a Jewish world asset, the USHMM would become a highly controversial site in the heart of the US capital. Secondly, such cooperation between American Jews and Armenians would have a severe adverse effect on the already bad relations between Israel and Turkey, potentially leading to a complete fracture in those relations. This chapter demonstrates how, in a late Cold War context, including the Armenian genocide in the America-based museum could worsen Turkey's public, political and diplomatic image in the US. Specifically, highlighting the Turkish treatment of its ethnic minorities and abuses of their human rights would potentially harm American relations with one of its most important Cold War and NATO allies. Such a scenario could also decrease the US's competence to mediate between Ankara and Jerusalem, which was clearly an important Israeli lever in its drive to normalise relations with Turkey. Together, it is argued, these provided compelling motivations for Israel to reinforce Turkey's narrative.

I develop the argument across three main parts. The first part examines the initiative of the USHMM in the early years of the project side-by-side with the deteriorating relations between Israel and Turkey (1979–1983). Specifically, it argues

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<sup>6</sup> See Bali, *Model Citizens of the State*, 313. Set Momjian was a director of international marketing for the Ford Motor Company and the US committee member on the UN Human Rights Commission.

<sup>7</sup> Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 228–31; “Momjian pledges \$1 Million on behalf of the Armenians,” *The Armenian Mirror Spectator* (June 28, 1980), 1.

that the attempts to include the contested memories of the Armenian genocide prompted the concern of Ankara, and then Jerusalem, and thus attempts to influence the memorial committee to change this decision. The second part outlines the lobbying activities conducted by American Jews, Armenians and Turks for and against the inclusion of the 1915 genocide in the prospective memorial. This section emphasises the dispute within the Jewish organisations regarding the appropriate price tag for helping the Turks, specifically whether a condition for blocking the Armenians should be an immediate improvement in Turkey's attitude to Israel. The third and final part charts the more advanced plans of the USHMM alongside the rehabilitation of Israeli-Turkish relations between 1985 and 1988.

### **1978–1979: Establishing the USHMC**

The intention of the 'Presidential Commission on the Holocaust' established by the US President Jimmy Carter in November 1978 was to offer the president an informed and carefully designed, yet formative, plan for how to formulate the Holocaust days of remembrance, shaping the education and memory of the Holocaust in the American public sphere.<sup>8</sup> The committee members included, among others, Holocaust survivors such as Elie Wiesel and Benjamin Meed, American senators and Jewish American Congress members such as Stephan Solarz, who has been mentioned in previous chapters of this thesis, Jewish-American journalists such as Hayman Bookbinder and academic specialists on the Holocaust such as Professor Raul Hilberg, each of whom contributed their own expertise and insights to the initial planning of the memorial.

With respect to the domestic US political arena, this chapter studies the extent to which the memory politics of the Jewish Holocaust was dominated by militant Jewish American Holocaust survivors. These survivors sought to promote an anti-German museum which idealised the unique suffering of the Jews. Specifically, since the prospective memorial was based in the US, the country of immigrants *par excellence*, the establishment of the museum offered a unique opportunity for other ethnic minorities to record their trauma and their heritage on a national stage. This opportunity highlights a few points of controversy, namely the ethnic lobbying of four groups: Jews,

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<sup>8</sup> Wiesel, "Report to the President", 1.

Armenians, Turks and Greeks, each of whom attempted to advance their own ethnic interests by lobbying for or against the inclusion of the Armenian genocide in the USHMM. This angle is important to the premise of the chapter, because it casts light on how Israeli diplomats were able to exploit local US political dynamics regarding the USHMM to secure Israel's own interests in the Middle East.

When the committee submitted its first report on 27 September 1979, among many other details, three factors should be emphasised in relation to this chapter and in the context of the Armenian genocide and Israeli-Turkish relations: Firstly, the day of remembrance of the Holocaust was to be held in April, the 27 of '*Nisan*' [in Hebrew], of each calendar year (following the Jewish calendar), which, according to the committee never clashes with Passover or Easter. The commission further recommended that the commemorative model would begin in April 1979.<sup>9</sup> These recommendations by the Presidential Commission based on the Jewish calendar, for a US Civic Day of Remembrance, however, meant that this Day of Remembrance would be close to the international day of remembrance for the 1915 Armenian genocide, 24 April. This potential clash of dates offered a window of opportunity for the US Armenian community to highlight the 1915 genocide to the local American public, since it could be associated with the contemporaneous commemoration of the Holocaust. This will be examined further in this chapter.

The third factor, as both Eder and Linenthal had highlighted before, was that, almost from the first moment of launching this project, President Carter adopted a broad scope in respect to who should be considered as victims of the Holocaust. Carter based his views on the number of 11 million victims suggested by Simon Wiesenthal. More importantly, based on the diversity of the victims, Carter required equal diversity in the number of non-Jewish representatives that were to be included in the memorial council.<sup>10</sup> All three of these factors showcase the possible tension and intrigues of the memorial in respect to establishing the boundaries of inclusion. Specifically, the funding model and Carter's definitions of victimisation must be taken into account in understanding how the USHMM 'problem' was born and how the contested memories of the Armenian genocide could have worked themselves into the memorial.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>10</sup> See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 35–51; Eder, *Holocaust Angst*, 85.

In an oral interview, Alon Liel emphasised the importance of the planning period with respect to the USHMM. Given that after the formal decision to launch the project, it was obvious that it would be executed, the challenge for interested parties was then to influence its design. Liel noted that “understanding very well that the memorial is a fact, and with a clear aim to put their agenda into the memorial, the Armenian Americans pressured the USHMC, especially during the planning period”.<sup>11</sup> Liel’s account highlights that although the USHMM did not open to visitors until 1992, the early 1980s was crucial to the decisions about the inclusion of the Armenian genocide within it.

### **Jerusalem-Ankara-Washington Relations: the USHMM, Cold War Security and the Armenian Genocide**

Although the USHMM project was established by President Carter in 1980, the controversies surrounding it unfolded into the subsequent period which forms the core of this chapter. The actual drama regarding the US references to the Armenian genocide, and the USHMM began in April 1981, when Ronald Reagan, the newly elected President, made a clear-cut reference to the Armenian genocide as a US commitment to include other episodes of genocide in the USHMM narrative. Reagan stated that: “Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it—and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples—the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten”.<sup>12</sup>

There is an important context concerning this final part of the thesis, and one that connects to Reagan’s statement above. Principle VII of the Helsinki Accords of 1975 declared that the “participating states recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See 22 April, 1981, Proclamation 4838: “Days of Remembrance of Victims of the Holocaust”, Ronald Reagan’s speech in: [www.deutscharmenischegesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ronald-Reagan-Proclamation-4838-Days-of-Remembrance-of-Victims-of-the-Holocaust-19810422.pdf](http://www.deutscharmenischegesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ronald-Reagan-Proclamation-4838-Days-of-Remembrance-of-Victims-of-the-Holocaust-19810422.pdf) (accessed on 26 April, 2018).

and co-operation among themselves as among all States”.<sup>13</sup> Even though this principle was endorsed by Reagan when he explicitly referred to the Armenian genocide, it will be shown in this and the following chapter that the Reagan administration had to step back from this statement. This point is critical to understand the third and final part of the thesis. i.e. why the Reagan administration took a clear stance that Cold War fears and Turkey’s role in NATO were more important than human rights norms, while the Western European countries, some of which also members of NATO, were not discouraged from recognising the Armenian genocide in the 1987 European Parliament resolution.

After the above dramatic statement was made, the pressure on the Israeli MFA from Turkey’s military and MFA to use Israel’s ‘magical power’ via the American Jewish organisations to moderate the Reagan administration’s view of the Armenian genocide intensified. It might look as though Israel’s policy is immoral, prioritising Cold War fears over the expense of human rights values and genocide prevention.<sup>14</sup> However, choosing between universalism and Jewish particularism is not a zero-sum game but rather a much more complicated process of balancing human rights values and national interests.

On 20 August 1981, urgent telegrams were exchanged between Istanbul and Jerusalem. In the telegrams, it is reported that the Israeli consul—Avner Arazi, who was also the MFA official who was very active around the 1982 conference—had met Jack Kamhi, leader of the Jewish community in Istanbul, for an update about the USHMM. Kamhi informed Arazi that the Turkish government had asked him to focus on the USHMM front because President Reagan had publicly announced that the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust were historically connected. To this end, Kamhi met Turkish ambassador Elekdağ, in Washington, who in turn expressed his concern that the Armenians had been able to install an Armenian representative into the memorial council (i.e. Set Momjian), who would be able to propagate against Turkey from within the memorial committee.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Kamhi also informed Arazi that

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<sup>13</sup> See [hrlibrary.umn.edu/osce/basics/finact75.htm](http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/osce/basics/finact75.htm) (accessed on 05 February, 2019); Keys and Burke, “Human Rights”, 495.

<sup>14</sup> Levey, “Israel, Nigeria and the Biafra,”

<sup>15</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: the USHMM in Washington DC, 20 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/5145, 1.



although the Turks understand that most of the memorial council members do not support Momjian's narrative, the Armenian representative has been able to convince some of the Jewish members of the council to support him and the Armenians. Arazi noted: "Kamhi asked me to raise his and the Turkish-Jewish community's concern with the Israeli government regarding the possibility of mixing the Armenian 'tragedy' with the Jewish Holocaust, since this would drive an antisemitic reaction in Turkey, directly affecting Turkish Jews, as well as minimising the singularity of the Holocaust".<sup>16</sup>

As noted, however, in an oral interview with Itamar Rabinovich, who served as Israeli ambassador in Washington, DC (1993–1996), there is another dimension that one needs to consider regarding Turkey's use of the diplomatic services of people as Kamhi in a place like Washington DC. Rabinovich proposes that the Turks wrongly assumed that Israel's embassy in Washington DC simply invited any Jewish Congressman it wanted and gave him orders. It clearly did not work this way, but the Turks did not understand this. In Rabinovich's view, some Israeli politicians, and sometimes even diplomats, used this myth to create a false impression that Israel could influence US policies.<sup>17</sup>

Gabi Levy, who served in Ankara as Israeli ambassador (2007–2011), joins Rabinovich in attempt to sketch the Turkish myth about Israel's abilities in the US capital. Levy noted in an oral interview that through all the history of Israeli-Turkish relations, the Turks carried assumptions regarding the 'magical power' of Israel's foreign policy in Washington DC: "it's clearly not to the degree to which the Turks give Israel credit for. Every time Turkey had a problem with the American administrations they came to us, specifically, the Armenian issue is one of the most important and frequent issues that they have asked for our help within the US capital".<sup>18</sup>

Rabinovich and Levy cast light on the expectations management between the Turks and Israelis about the American Jews' real ability to influence the policies in Washington. Based on their oral testimony, we can generally understand that there was an issue with the Turks' expectations which did not bode well for Israeli interests. Its sounds, especially from Levi's impression, as if Turkish expectations were founded on

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Rabinovich, 2 February 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Levy, 3 February 2016.

antisemitic assumptions, when Levi mentions 'a magical power' that Israel and the American Jews hold over Washington.

The works by Novick and Diner on the history of the American Jews and Holocaust memory in the US, respectively, have demonstrated that, for several reasons, such as the marginalisation of Holocaust memory in American culture in the early post-war decades, and the relatively small proportion of Holocaust survivors in the demography of American Jews, made the expectation of the Turks here and almost anywhere else in this thesis unrealistic regarding that Jewish 'magical power'.<sup>19</sup> So what can be understood from these oral accounts versus the MFA documents is that there was a gap in expectations: the American Jews were not as motivated helping the Turks with the Armenian genocide as perhaps Israeli MFA would have wished for. The American Jews only provided some help to Turkey's MFA thanks to concerns about Jews being vulnerable again rather than maintaining the idea of the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust within the USHMM.

In the context of the USHMM and Turkish anxieties regarding a possible inclusion in the memorial, this gap in expectations was a basis for disappointment which could lead to a complete breakdown in relations rather than the hoped-for normalisation. Indeed, during 1981, the latter did seem like a reasonable option. Nonetheless, as in the case of ASALA, the contested memories of the 1915 genocide offered the opportunity for diplomatic leverage to serve Israel's diplomatic ends. In other words, if Jerusalem could demonstrate an effort to help the Turks then this might win Israel positive points and also serve Israel's national narrative that the Holocaust was a singular historical event that should be commemorated in the US separately from any other genocide.

Turning to Arazi's telegram above, the message was well received in Jerusalem. In the context of the Israeli-Turkish crisis, Jerusalem tried to lower the tension in respect to the USHMM and the Armenians. On that same day the MFA issued two responses. Hanan Bar-On, Deputy General Manager of Israeli MFA (1979–1987) wrote to the Israeli embassy in Washington that they urgently needed to find out who the Armenian representative on the USHMC was. Secondly, Bar-On wrote that it would be very

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<sup>19</sup> See Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 6; Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 245.

helpful if the Jewish American organisations would approach Elekdağ, the Turkish ambassador in Washington DC, to deny that there was any intention to include the Armenian issue in the memorial, using the argument that the memorial was a Jewish memorial that focuses on the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime. Furthermore, Bar On also requested that the Jewish organisation should also issue this denial to a few Turkish journalists in the US.<sup>20</sup> In the second response, Hanan Bar On briefly updated Arazi in Istanbul that the Israeli embassy in Washington DC was taking immediate action in respect to the problem he had highlighted, and fully updated him about the measures undertaken in Washington so that Arazi could use this information in case of any encounter with the Turkish MFA.<sup>21</sup>

To provide practical support for this strategy, on the very next day, Jerusalem sent another telegram to Ankara asking Arazi to locate the names and addresses of prominent Turkish journalists in Washington and New York.<sup>22</sup> Three days later, the Israeli embassy in Washington informed Jerusalem that direct contact had been made with 'Bookie', i.e. Hayman Bookbinder, who was a member of the memorial council.<sup>23</sup> The Israeli diplomat, Eli Nechoshtan, updated Jerusalem that firstly he read to Bookbinder the titles of leading Turkish newspapers which had reported about the Armenian 'plot' to include the 1915 genocide within the Holocaust memorial. Thereafter, Nechoshtan asked Bookbinder to take Elie Wiesel with him and together make an appointment with the Turkish ambassador in DC, Elekdağ. Bookbinder replied that he would do that, but that Wiesel was currently abroad, therefore they could only meet Elekdağ the following week after Wiesel's return. As the document reported, Bookbinder understood, however, that things could not wait until the next week, so he phoned the Turkish embassy in D.C. and talked to a high-ranking individual named 'Balkan' (no first name is mentioned in the telegram) who was standing in for Elekdağ while he was on vacation. Bookbinder denied explicitly that there was an Armenian and Jewish plot and stated that he, Bookbinder, was against any Armenian initiative to

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<sup>20</sup> Jerusalem to Washington DC, re: USHMM, 20 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/7436, 1–2.

<sup>21</sup> Jerusalem to Istanbul, re: USHMM, 20 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/7493, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara and Istanbul, re: the USHMM, 21 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/7598, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem and the Prime Minister Office, re: the USHMM, 24 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/0845.

include themselves in the exhibition, because it was a memorial to the Jewish victims of WWII.<sup>24</sup>

As Nechoshtan further reports to Jerusalem, 'Bookie' also phoned Rabi Raskis from Minnesota, who was the head of the collection committee of the USHMM, requesting him to phone Balkan and to repeat the same line, which Raskis did, telling Balkan that "rest assured that there will be no Armenian display in the museum".<sup>25</sup> According to Nechoshtan's report, Balkan sounded pleased and promised 'Bookie' that he would phone Ankara to let them know about the recent developments. 'Bookie' also promised that when Elekdağ returned to D.C. he would make an appointment for him with a few Jewish members of USHMM, who would once again unanimously repeat the denial that the Jews would agree to the Armenian initiative.<sup>26</sup> From this correspondence, we can learn that the Jewish American representatives of the memorial committee had done a good job of convincing the Turkish diplomats that there was a chance that the Armenians would be left out of the memorial. That said, any renewed overtures between the Jews and to the Armenians could undermine these efforts.

On the same day, 24 August, however, another telegram was sent to Jerusalem, this time from Ankara. The update was that the Jewish community, specifically, Jack Kamhi was trying to highlight to the MFA the degree to which the Turkish Jews were concerned regarding the USHMM and how the Turkish government might react against Israel, even to the extent that Ankara would sever the already damaged relations with Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> Arazi, the consul in Istanbul, replied to Kamhi that he disagreed with his analysis, and that the MFA was doing everything possible to block the Armenians. At the bottom of the telegram Arazi wrote to Jerusalem that his impression was that the Turkish Jews were anxious about the USHMM issue and Kamhi hoped that Israel would work to secure their interests.

A week later, on 2 September 1981, the Israeli/Jewish American efforts described above proved to be even more effective. Arazi wrote to Jerusalem that Vassid

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem and Washington DC, re: the USHMM, 24 August 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/6248.

[Jeck] from the Turkish Jewish community, had informed him (Arazi) that Kamuran Gürün, the Turkish deputy foreign minister, had contacted Vassid to let him know that for now, the Turks were very pleased with the results of this USHMM endeavour on the part of the Turkish Jewish community.<sup>28</sup> Further, it should be noted that in the telegram, Gürün did not mention the Israeli efforts at all, suggesting possibly that Gürün had even not been informed about the Bar On initiative. Or, to put this differently, it is likely that, in the context of the deteriorating formal Israeli-Turkish relations, Turkey did not wish to put on record appreciation for Jerusalem's efforts, preferring to channel this through the Turkish Jews instead.

Turning back to the second part of the telegram, Vassid informed Arazi that three days later (5 September), Vassid would have lunch at Kamhi's residence, alongside Gürün. In this lunch, Vassid and Kamhi planned to try to lower Gürün's expectations as to the effectiveness of any pressure on the US administration with respect to the USHMM from the Turkish Jews, Israel and the American Jews, while also highlighting to Gürün the significant part played by Israel in this 'operation'.<sup>29</sup>

Subsequently, after the lunch had taken place at Kamhi's residence on 5 September, another telegram was issued by Arazi informing Jerusalem about the conversations. Arazi reports that during lunch, Gürün began the discussion of the Armenian question by going back to the eleventh century in an attempt to prove that the Armenians had never had any part in this Anatolia. Furthermore, Gürün proposed to his listeners that the Armenian population was never more a few hundred thousand and the disaster that had happened to the Armenians could not be compared to the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>30</sup> Before proceeding to the USHMM front, Gürün briefly touched upon the overlapping and equally troublesome issue of Armenian terrorism, which, according to Gürün, was driven by Soviet and PLO support. When Gürün asked to thank the Turkish Jews for their help with the USHMM, Vassid said in reply that it is the duty of the Turkish Jews to help the Turkish administration. Vassid further drew Gürün's attention to the fact that the efforts made by the Turkish Jewish community could not have been

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<sup>28</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: the USHMM, 02 September 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/8532.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: the USHMM, 09 September 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/668, 1.

effected without the help of Israel's MFA, who, he said, had showed a lot of sympathy and commitment to Turkey in respect to the USHMM. Gürün, however, did not reply to this statement by Vassid and froze.<sup>31</sup>

The reading of Arazi's report suggests that, as with the 1982 conference, although the Turks were grateful about the operation in respect to the USHMM, they did not show any explicit gratitude to Jerusalem, sending mixed signals to the Israeli diplomats as had also been the case with respect to ASALA and with the 1982 conference. It seems that Ankara was trying to showcase to Jerusalem that Turkey was yet not sufficiently impressed to restore Israeli-Turkish relations. The Turkish MFA knew that the Turkish Jews were reporting to the Israeli diplomats so, for Ankara, this was an ideal arrangement: to get the help the Turkish MFA needed without the Israeli MFA getting any significant credit for the operation. Furthermore, it also evident in Arazi's report how the 'Armenian question' was bothering the Turks across two discrete fronts: both in the USHMM, in the capital of their most important Western ally, the US, and simultaneously, the terror front, which, as Gürün mentioned, was driven by Soviet support.

This was only a temporary resolution of the issue, however. On 16 September the Israeli Chargé d'affaires in Ankara, Alon Liel (1981–1983), rushed a telegram to Jerusalem, urgently alerting them to some problems with reports in the Turkish press regarding the Israeli/Jewish initiative with respect to the USHMM. Turkey and the Turkish press continued to follow the news from Washington about the USHMM. It was being reported that Hayman Bookbinder (Bookie) had denied any Jewish cooperation with the Armenian narrative, arguing that the remaining 49 members of the committee were not planning to cooperate with the Armenian initiative and that the Armenian experience of 1915 would not be included in the museum against the committee members' will.<sup>32</sup>

In Liel's document, it was also reported that the White House Press Secretary had noted to the Turkish press that the Turkish Jews were living peacefully in Turkey and that Holocaust refugees had received shelter in Turkey. Furthermore, according to

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: the USHMM, 16 September 1981, 668, MFA, ISA, 000A4GO,1.

the newspaper article, the White House Press Secretary did not want the USHMM to lead to hostility with Turkey, which was an important US ally. So far, it seems as if the 'invited' reports in the Turkish media served the Israeli MFA's aims.<sup>33</sup> In what follows, however, Alon reported to Jerusalem that the English language *Hürriyet* Daily Newspaper wrote that, despite Bookbinder's statements, eight US Congress members had already stated that they would back the Armenians' inclusion in the memorial. According to Liel's telegram, *Hürriyet* reported that the reason for this was that Set Momjian, the Armenian member of the USHMC, had been able to convince the world that the Turks were responsible for Hitler's genocide of the Jews. Momjian had argued that the fate of the Armenians encouraged Hitler, and that this damaged Turkey's reputation and any formal response from the Americans could not fix the problem.<sup>34</sup>

On 5 October, Bar-On from the MFA informed Washington DC that the subsequent meeting between 'Bookie' and Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the USHMM affair should also be, in the MFA's opinion, devoted to the stagnant relations between Israel and Turkey. In the document, Bar On briefed Uri Ban Ner, the Israeli consul in Washington DC, on how to approach the Turkish diplomat in the meeting. Bar-On wrote that there was a Turkish thesis that the Western bloc and the US underpinned the suspended Israeli-Turkish relations. Proof of this thesis was Western silence regarding the crisis between Ankara and Jerusalem which reassured the Turks that they could continue to develop their relations with Arab energy suppliers at the expense of normalising relations with Israel.<sup>35</sup> According to Bar-On, therefore, the MFA was doing its best to inform the governments of Western countries, NATO institutions and the European parliament that the current Israeli-Turkish relations could deteriorate to a point where the only two countries in the Middle East who were traditionally committed to the Western alliance did not have any diplomatic relations with each other, and that only intensive efforts by the West in the Middle East would stop the deterioration and underpin Turkey's commitment to the Western alliance.<sup>36</sup>

This was the final report in the 1981 file regarding the affairs surrounding the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, re: the USHMM, 16 September 1981, ISA/MFA/000A4GO/668, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

USHMM and the Israeli-Turkish-American relations. This section sheds light on several issues relating to the establishment of the USHMM in respect to the argument of the chapter and of the thesis more broadly. Specifically, it goes to show how, in the context of the Cold War Western alliance, Ankara was positioning itself as a victim vis à vis the Armenians: using ASALA killings against Turkish diplomats and Cold War fears within the Reagan administration to exert pressure by suggesting that a narrative within the USHMC connecting the Armenian genocide with the Holocaust could pose a threat to the Western alliance and NATO interests.

### **Ethnic Lobbying: Jewish American Organisations, Israeli-Turkish Relations and the USHMM (1982)**

During early January 1982, a few telegram exchanges took place in respect to a booklet noting the Turkish propaganda on the Armenian question. This booklet was used by an anonymous American-Turkish organisation in its meeting with Jewish-American organisations.<sup>37</sup> The document uncovers the efforts undertaken by the American-Turkish organisation to court the American Jews in relation to the USHMM. As a counter lobbying effort against the American-Armenians, the Turks emphasised in their booklet, entitled ‘Holocaust Memorial Talking Points’, how to advocate against the Armenian narrative, or as stated in the outset of this booklet ‘the Armenian myth’. In what appears as a ‘note to self’ the Turkish lobby asked the readers to remember that this fact sheet should not be used as official material but only as a ‘flexible’ guide which can be tailored from one meeting to another, depending on the nature and focus of the meeting.<sup>38</sup> Among the various issues that the Turkish-American organisation listed in their fact sheet, one can underline the Turks’ self-image as victims of the memorial; specifically, the biggest insult to the Turks was that the possible inclusion of ‘the Armenian myth’ in the Jewish memorial as “victims of genocide, wrongly incriminates the Turkish people as the party responsible for this alleged act [...] that the Turks will be placed in same category with the Nazis is an outrage”.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem, re: Turkey and the USHMM, 13 January 1982, ISA/MFA/000A4GO.

<sup>38</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem, appendix, re: Holocaust Memorial Talking Points, 13 January 1982, ISA/MFA/000A4GO. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2.



The Turkish-American lobby highlighted several of the issues that have been discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis as arguments encouraging the Jewish American organisations to reconsider the idea of including the Armenians in the memorial and by contrast to support the Turkish narrative. Most importantly, the Turks fought back and, like the Armenians and the Jews, used their ethnic lobby to advocate against the genocide allegations. The content of this booklet reads like a refurbished version of the argument made before by the Turkish military elite as noted in the first and third chapters. This is another reminder of how ASALA's terrorism and the more constructive memorial work by the Armenians in the 1982 conference and at the USHMM interconnected. According to the Turkish-Americans, to include in the memorial the Armenian claims made by ASALA accusing the Turks of genocide "would support international terrorism and ultimately support the objectives of the Soviet Union".<sup>40</sup> These points were in fact taken up by the Israeli MFA officials who used some of them to influence the Reagan administration and the American Jews, arguing that blocking the Armenian initiative would be in the interests of NATO and the Western alliance in the Middle East.

### **The USHMC Meeting and the Politics of Inclusion (1983)**

According to ISA documents, during the first half of 1983, the USHMC held a low profile meeting in which no substantial progress was made and therefore no meaningful issues were noted from an Israeli-Turkish relations perspective. If one examines the USHMC meeting held on 4 August 1983, however, a few problematic features from the early years were still contested by the USHMC members.

According to the protocol, the meeting lasted a few hours and, given that it did not have a specific agenda, each of the members received the opportunity to bring his/her concerns to the discussion. The protocol surveys the issue of funding difficulties, especially in respect to private donors. The main difficulty according to the members was that the \$100 million US dollars which the federal commission aimed to achieve was a very high hurdle, and the committee members therefore highlighted the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 8.

need to raise money from non-Jewish contributors.<sup>41</sup>

The second difficulty was the memorial narrative, which was related to that of the funding challenges. Specifically, what should be the desired narrative of the memorial, which had to consider not only Jewish but also non-Jewish visitors? Among other issues, the academic members in the USHMC brought to the attention of the members continuities in violence between different episodes; Professor Raul Hilberg, for example, pointed out that the violence perpetrated against Soviet prisoners was later adopted against the Jews, and, very relevant to this chapter's analysis, Professors Arthur Davis and Willard Fletcher demonstrated to the committee members that the Armenian genocide "served as a direct historical precedent to Hitler's final solution".<sup>42</sup> This in fact allies with the most recent work by Stefan Ihrig which demonstrates how the Nazi persecution of the European Jews found justification in the treatment of the Armenians in 1915.<sup>43</sup>

Another substantial point was made by some members who identified the merit of the USHMM as a 'potential endeavour' against ongoing forms of oppression such as in India or Guatemala, or in other words genocide prevention. Another comment related to the East-West tension was made by the member Benjamin Meed, who had received a donation of \$1,200 from Soviet Jews who were not allowed to speak about the Holocaust in the Soviet Union but wanted to contribute to the commemoration of the European Jews. The protocol ends with the comment that after a "lengthy discussion on the genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government against the Armenian people during WWI, the council informally agreed to recommit itself to include this tragedy in the memorial museum".<sup>44</sup>

This short document recapitulates some of the points made in the earlier sections of this chapter. The discussion could be read both in the context of the initial planning of President Carter to establish the USHMM as a museum that promoted the memory of the Holocaust side by side with genocide prevention and human rights as the core of the Helsinki Accords (1975) and President Reagan's recanting of his initial recognition

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<sup>41</sup> USHMC report, New York City Hebrew Union College, 4 August 1983, ISA/MFA/000A4GO, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide*.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of the Armenian genocide in 1981. The difficulties that were brought to the table by the USHMC members seem to well represent the differences of opinion which also caused tension between two different perceptions of the USHMM: on the one hand, those who aligned with Carter's initial plan of 'days of remembrance' in 1978, and on the other, those who emphasised Cold War security interests in the Middle East. By 1983, it seems, the fundamental problem with funding the memorial, made those who represented Carter's vision the dominant voice in the committee. The external pressure on the USHMC by the Turks, the Israeli diplomats, and Jewish organisations during 1980–1982 shows the degree to which these measures had already permeated into the USHMC's decision making.

### **California and Relations Between Ethnic Armenians and Ethnic Jews (1985)**

As has been discussed throughout this chapter, the local US arena had a significant role in enhancing the wider US public policy regarding the memory of the Armenian genocide. In an oral interview, Itamar Rabinovich recounts that the Armenians based in California knew their 'job' very well in terms of pushing the Armenian issue into the US political arena very aggressively; they were very well-connected in the US capital. This was especially the case, Rabinovich said, "during the period of the 1980s when the Armenian George Deukmejian was Governor of California".<sup>45</sup> Alon Liel further emphasised the fact that cooperation between Jews and Armenians in California was common and offered a helpful way for the Armenians to bring their issue to the USHMM and back the Armenian resolution in the US Congress which was initiated in the mid-1980s.<sup>46</sup> Rabinovich and Liel each, therefore, cast light on the effectiveness of the Jewish-Armenian cooperation within the Californian-based diaspora. Using the more liberal setting in California served the Armenians well when they needed to push their commemorative agenda, not just with the USHMM but also with the first Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress in 1987 (the focus of the next chapter).

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<sup>45</sup> Interview, Rabinovich, 2 February 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

Hanna Palti, the Israeli consul in Los Angeles (1980–1985), wrote a short update to Jerusalem regarding some power dynamics between the Jews, Armenians and Turks in California. Palti reported that the memory of the ‘Armenian massacre’ during WWI was a substantial feature in the self-awareness of the Armenians in California. The large number of Armenian organisations based in Los Angeles, and the vast Armenian population (over 300,000), had served to make Los Angeles a centre from which to target Turkish diplomats; not surprisingly, therefore, Turkish diplomats were murdered there at that time.<sup>47</sup> Palti further argued that the Turks needed to defend themselves, and Los Angeles was an extremely important front in this regard. Palti noted that the Israeli diplomats had a serious challenge, therefore, in maintaining good relationship with both Armenians and Turks.<sup>48</sup>

As a response, Yitzhak Lior wrote to Palti that the pathological sensitivity of the Turkish MFA to the Armenian issue was well known and that the American front of this dispute between the Armenians and the Turks was wide and substantial. Jerusalem would therefore prefer a straightforward policy of non-intervention; when it was necessary, however, Lior argued “that Israel needed to take a tactical stance”.<sup>49</sup> Eli Sheked, the Israeli consul in Istanbul, replied to Lior, noting that the main problem with the ‘Armenian question’ in the US was that Turkey was blackmailing the Turkish Jews, i.e. people such as Jack Kamhi, to be Turkish ambassadors in Western countries, specifically towards their Jewish communities. “The fact that we [Israel] are noticing that the Turkish Jews are assigned to blackmail other Jewish communities is absurd, thus people like Kamhi needs to know also how to say, no thanks”.<sup>50</sup>

Palti's letter to Jerusalem and the responses from Lior and Sheked serve to tie together the parts of this chapter, as well as some parts of other chapters in the thesis. The above exchanges showcase the degree to which the California-based Armenian community was able to make a substantial and consistent contribution to commemorating the 1915 genocide. Together with the assassinations of Turkish

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<sup>47</sup> Israeli consul in LA to Jerusalem, re: Jewish-Armenians-Turkish Relations in LA, 14 January 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPW.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>49</sup> Jerusalem to Istanbul, re: the Jews and the Armenian Problem, 1 February 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPW.

<sup>50</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem, re: the Jews et al., 7 February 1985, ISA/MFA/0003BPW.

diplomats in Los Angeles during the 1970s by ASALA they created a hostile climate for Turkey in one of the US's most important cities. Palti's account also goes to show that some Israeli diplomats were sometimes not quite as enthusiastic about helping Turkey at all costs as the pro-Turkish faction that Lior and Sheked represented. At this point in the chapter, it is even clearer than before how the Armenians were able to leverage their local lobby from California into the USHMC and to bring their disputed past into America's national agenda thus making it a potential international and Cold War related crisis. The funds contributed to the US memorial only improved their chances of gaining space in the Holocaust memorial.

Late 1985 marked another symbolic, yet important, development in the process of the establishment and foundation of the USHMM; in a federal ceremony on 16 October 1985, Raoul Wallenberg square was inaugurated in Washington DC, and the cornerstone of the forthcoming USHMM was laid. This was a benchmark which, although symbolic, demonstrated the development of the project and thus the pressure on the USHMC, MFA and the American and Turkish Jews would be expected to intensify further as the project moved towards completion.<sup>51</sup>

### **Normalising Israeli-Turkish Relations: the USHMM and Turkey's Public Image in the US (1986)**

Not surprisingly, in assessing the following document, it is evident that by early 1986 the American Jews had undertaken more extensive measures to link Israeli interests with any help provided on the USHMM. To recap, in contrast to Gürün's meeting with the WJC in April 1982, by early 1986, the American Jews seemed to understand that the more Turkey needed the American Jews to remove any Armenian initiative in the USHMM, the more the Turks needed to do in terms of normalising relations with Israel.

The following document outlines two meetings held in Turkey involving Paul Berger, a Jewish-American lawyer who was a senior partner in the Washington DC firm Arnold and Porter. In the first meeting Berger met Jack Kamhi in Istanbul. Ostensibly, Kamhi had hired Berger's company to represent his business interests in

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<sup>51</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem, re: The USHMM, 16 October 1985, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/392.

the US; as the document uncovers, however, unofficially, Kamhi had hired Berger's firm to lobby in Washington DC for the Turkish MFA against any Armenian-related discussions, namely the inclusion in the USHMM and improving Turkey's reputation in the US.<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, as the MFA document outlines, during his visit to Ankara Berger met with Erhan Tuncel, a high-ranking official in the Turkish MFA. As in previous meetings with American Jews, Tuncel referred Berger to Turkey's treatment and rescue of Jews in the WWII, which drove Turkey to question why the American Jews were conspiring with Armenians. Berger, in his turn, did not address the Turkish question above, but tried to manage the expectations with the Turks regarding his office and the type of clients they worked with. Then Berger sought to go more into detail regarding the trade-off between his office and the Turks: according to the document Berger emphasised to the Turkish officials that Israel's government could give a 'green light' to the US administration on any Turkey related issue, namely the 'Armenian question' and the USHMM. In this context, any votes by Turkey on resolutions against Israel in the UN would work against Turkey with respect to Israel's support on the Armenian issue. Berger further expressed his deep concern about Turkey's public image in the US, "which is quite problematic".<sup>53</sup> The report to Jerusalem concluded that Berger discussed Israel's interests in regards to the Armenian issue, to make sure that Turkey's MFA understood Israel's dominant role in this process.<sup>54</sup>

To recap, one can detect a shift from the ways in which the American Jews, this time Berger, were discussing Israel's role and impact on the Armenian inclusion in the USHMM. The principle here is that the better the relations became with the Turks, and the more intense the Armenian pressure to be included in the USHMM, the more Israel become part of the trade-off in removing the Armenians from the Museum.

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<sup>52</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem, re: Turkey, Israel, US, 24 January 1986, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/685.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

## **Jerusalem to Washington DC: Governmental Agreement Regarding Holocaust Commemoration**

Later that year, in November 1986, Jo Yaccov, an Israeli diplomat from the MFA office in Jerusalem outlined that the Israeli government and the American administration had reached a formal agreement during the summer of 1986 for cooperation between USHMM and Yad Vashem regarding commemorative activities in respect to the Holocaust.<sup>55</sup> Yaccov noted in the documents that because the USHMM was a formally established federal initiative its board of directors was appointed by the US president (initially Carter and thereafter Reagan) therefore any agreements concerning the USHMM had to be signed by the US administration. Furthermore, Yaccov outlined that the basic idea behind this agreement was that Israel's interests in the memorial would in the future be managed by Yad Vashem, i.e. that Yad Vashem would be able to monitor USHMM exhibitions in order to make sure that there were no duplications and overlaps with exhibitions presented by Yad Vashem that might minimise the significance of Yad Vashem's work.<sup>56</sup>

The above agreement mirrors the Yad Vashem school and Holocaust memory culture in Israel during the 1970s and 1980s. But, in the context of the story of this chapter, the agreement between the two museums served as a means not just to protect Yad Vashem's position concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust but also the MFA's aspiration of normalising relations with Ankara. Moreover, the agreement above came to a perfect timing when the race to exclude the Armenians from the exhibition was renewed in earnest in 1986. Although it derived from different institutional agendas, Yad Vashem's interests provided the push the MFA needed.

1986, therefore, saw a number of substantial developments. First, the American Jews tightened their conditions for helping the Turks. To recap, as the second chapter of the thesis has demonstrated, by 1986 Turkey was showing signs of a desire to normalise the relations with Israel, partly driven by Israel's ability to provide essential aid to Turkey in respect of the 'Armenian question'. On the Israeli end, as some of the diplomats' oral accounts have pointed out, the MFA leveraged Israel's image and

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<sup>55</sup> Washington DC to Jerusalem re: Governmental Agreement Regarding Holocaust Commemoration, 2 December 1986, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/423, 1–2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.

Turkish views of Israel's 'magical powers' in the US capital vis à vis the Armenians and the USHMM. Second, seeking an agreement between the Israeli government and the US administration further demonstrated the measures Israel was undertaking to secure the future USHMM narrative. Although the official narrative was that this was to make sure there were no overlaps with Yad Vashem, the agreement might also be thought to provide Yad Vashem with some legitimacy to monitor any attempt to minimise the memory of the Shoah in the US memorial by inclusion of other genocides, specifically, the 1915 genocide.

### **Towards a USHMM Lacking an Armenian Dimension (1987–1988)**

Furthermore, during early 1987 the attempt to establish a governmental agreement seeking to monitor the USHMM narrative was still an issue concerning the Israeli MFA. In January 1987 Gideon Tadmor, an Israeli diplomat who served as the head of the MFA's Jewish diaspora department (1986–1988) problematised the narrative of the USHMM. In his account, Tadmor suggested that "there could be no disputing that the forthcoming memorial was a worthy alternative to Yad Vashem".<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Tadmor argued that Israel should avoid any involvement in the US's internal issues because it was a federal project, including whether or not the memorial engaged with the longstanding Armenian-Turkish domestic dispute. That said, Tadmor wrote: "one can understand Israel's extensive reservations about a narrative of the USHMM that aimed to emphasise the other 'Holocausts', hence minimising the singularity of the Jewish experience".<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Tadmor assessed that "in ten or twenty years' time, the Jews will not be represented in the memorial, instead the 'goyim' will be there, and the memorial will become an international institution of genocide, which guarantees the minimisation of the value of the Shoah".<sup>59</sup>

Tadmor's words give us another snapshot about the mindset of the average Israeli diplomat during the mid-1980s regarding the Holocaust uniqueness memory culture. Not just as second-generation Holocaust survivors who might be influenced

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<sup>57</sup> Diaspora dep. to Jerusalem, re: Turkey, Israel, US, 24 January 1986, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/685.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



by his family narrative, Tadmor's views also represented mainstream Israeli Holocaust memory culture in this period. This concern intersects with the Israeli diplomatic staff in Turkey and the US to secure the future narrative of the USHMM, tightening the noose on the Armenians' chances of including their genocide in the memorial.

During mid-August 1987, a renewed decision was made by the USHMC to follow up with the 1983 commitment to include the 1915 genocide in the memorial. In a letter by Sam Eshkenazi, the USHMM director of public affairs, addressed to Paul Berger, Eshkenazi enclosed a written statement by the USHMC about the 1915 genocide. In a response to public and governmental inquiries regarding the status of the Armenian genocide:

the genocide of the Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Turkish Empire between 1915 and 1923 will have a place at the USHMM and its library. The fate of the Armenians should be included in any discussion of genocide in the twentieth century. Inclusion of the Armenian genocide was approved by the council on 4 August 1983.<sup>60</sup>

This statement increased anxiety levels in Ankara and Jerusalem. One should note that the renewed decision by USHMC in 1987 was taken at the same time that the bill for a National Day of Remembrance of the Armenian genocide was rejected by the US Congress in early August 1987, as the next chapter shows. In the context of this achievement, defeated but undeterred, the Armenians understood well that incorporating the Armenian genocide into the USHMM narrative was the only way to raise public awareness of the genocide in the US. Although there is no follow-up document in the MFA box with a response from Berger, which might have cast light on the steps he took against this decision, one can estimate that given Berger's new position as Turkey's lobbyist in Washington he was working to change the decision. More importantly, this statement demonstrates that the Armenian determination from the early years of the memorial, and 1983 specifically, paid off, so that even the considerable efforts made by Israel and the American and Turkish Jews could not change the decision about the memorial.

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<sup>60</sup> Eshkenazi to Berger, 18 August 1987, MFA/ISA/000A4G4, 1–2.

By early 1988, however, it seems that the positive momentum in Israeli-Turkish relations had led to significant cooperation vis à vis the USHMM since the Israeli MFA and the American Jews took full control over the situation in Washington. Specifically, Lior from MFA wrote to Washington that the plan was now focused on creating an opposition in the USHMC to work from within the USHMC itself to block or significantly reduce the inclusion of ‘any foreign parties’ in the Jewish memorial. The first practical step would be to conduct two or three meetings with Abraham Foxman in New York and then with Paul Berger in Washington to establish a common understanding among them and MFA on how to deal with the Armenian genocide in the USHMM. Lior adds that “After meeting with them we can contact Harvey Meyerdorff, the Chairman of the USHMM. Then we can decide which council members we should approach that can help us”.<sup>61</sup>

A month later, Lior wrote a full report outlining the results of the intensive meetings he had conducted in Washington regarding the USHMM. Lior noted that he and the Israeli consul in Washington DC had conducted several meetings in New York City, Washington and Baltimore with Jewish members of the USHMC. There seems to have been an understanding, although not a public acknowledgment, that in the past the American Jews had made a mistake in allying with the Armenians, and that it was now very hard to back out of the commitment to them:

We have put extensive pressure on the Jewish members of the memorial committee, arguing the USHMM will be the only controversial venue in the Mall, instead of a Jewish asset. Furthermore, the Turks will never come to terms with this, and the Turkish Jews will raise it as public concern that their brothers in the US are putting the country which has been good to them on the same level as with the Nazis. What good can come out of this? Why should we open this Pandora’s box? Who authorised us to reduce the singularity of the Holocaust by including other historical disputes? <sup>62</sup>

The possible answers to all the above questions are that no one grants this moral

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<sup>61</sup> Jerusalem to Washington DC, 10 February 1988, 572, ISA, MFA, 000A4G4.

<sup>62</sup> Washington to Jerusalem, re: the Turks and the USHMM, 584, 5 March 1988, ISA, MFA, 000A4G4.

authority, but state officials use such questions frequently for their national or their own selfish gains. Raising these moral rhetorical questions of one's peers does not make it all right or wrong but helps to salve the conscience with respect to the strategy undertaken by the Israeli diplomats regarding the USHMM. All of this reads like an action that was undertaken in a critical context and period, that was carried out almost throughout the period that this thesis investigates. This question raised in Lior's account was underpinned by Israel's Holocaust memory culture, especially Yad Vashem's school of Holocaust uniqueness.

Lior further explained in his account that although the Jewish-American members of the board acknowledged the issue of commitment to the Armenians, it was not so simple to explain to the Armenians who donated funds to the memorial and who held high status in the US public and political arena, that the USHMC's early promise would not be fulfilled. The most important factor here was the MFA's ability to create an opposition within the memorial board in favour of a 'clean' museum.<sup>63</sup> The frontman of this opposition was Abe Foxman, the director of ADL, who agreed to make a dramatic announcement to the memorial council that he would resign if the Armenian issue were to be included after all:

By the time the USHMM will be open to the public I think that we should take further steps to secure that the Armenians will not be represented at the museum in any possible way. Therefore, we have decided on five further steps: firstly, a Turkish delegation will meet the USHMC and receive the opportunity to present their arguments. Second, the Turks will prepare a letter with their arguments which will be circulated to anyone who is related to the memorial. Third, the Turkish Jews will send a formal letter to the USHMC and outline their outrage with the contested decision. Fourth, we have met with Tom Lantos, he is a Holocaust survivor and one of Turkey's most loyal friends. He is willing to join the USHMM board, and we will pressure the committee to accept him as a new member. Lastly, we will make an effort to include other pro-Turkish members into the memorial

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2.

board, and we will operate with Professor Israel Gutman (from Yad Vashem) who was recently appointed as an external advisor to the content committee.<sup>64</sup>

Tom Lantos was a Holocaust survivor, human rights activist and a member of the US House of Representatives from California. From the early 2000s, as the chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Lantos was one of the Armenian Americans' greatest supporters, and a prominent advocate within Congress for the recognition of the Armenian genocide.<sup>65</sup> In the 1980s, certainly, the Turks would have liked to get Lantos on board with their aims but that seemed unlikely given his pro-Armenian stance.

In an oral interview, Yitzhak Lior recalled that he had helped three generations of Turkish diplomats in the US with any related issue connected to the Armenian genocide. During the interview Lior noted that during the discussions within the Israeli MFA about the USHMM, extensive measures to support the Turks were agreed, aiming to demonstrate to the Turks that Israel was on their side. Lior also mentioned, however, that when the Turks came to meetings with Israeli diplomats, they appeared insecure and unable to innovate, indeed he said that "they always show up with a page to instruct them on what to say, and they always try to stick to that page, not saying anything beyond that".<sup>66</sup> According to Lior, however, this insecurity on the part of the Turks helped Israel because it gave the Israeli MFA the opportunity to be active in demonstrating its ability to influence Washington and thus gave Israel leverage in influencing the Turks in other areas, such as the Armenian genocide.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Alon Liel recalled in an oral interview that, after all, the Israeli diplomats made the plan work in 1988, suggesting a compromise which was quite far from the original promise to incorporate the memory of the 1915 genocide into the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> See [www.congressionaldigest.com/issue/armenian-genocide/honorable-tom-lantos/](http://www.congressionaldigest.com/issue/armenian-genocide/honorable-tom-lantos/) (accessed 29 March 2019).

<sup>66</sup> Interview, Lior, 26 June, 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

memorial.<sup>68</sup> “We [MFA] made a suggestion, which the USHMC accepted after a long dispute that there would be a small room in the memorial, that would have a temporary exhibition on other episodes of modern genocide and mass atrocities”.<sup>69</sup> The Armenians received the first opportunity to be hosted in this temporary exhibition room. The Armenians were extremely unhappy, but this way the Israeli MFA made sure that the Armenian genocide would not be a part of the permanent exhibition of the USHMM and make it a contested site until the end of times.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations and the importance of Turkey as a Cold War ally for both the US and Israel drove Israeli diplomats and Jewish American organisations to pressure the USHMC not to include references to the Armenian genocide within the memorial. Specifically, by creating an opposition within the memorial council, the Israeli MFA hoped to persuade the USHMC to withdraw from its initial commitment to include the Armenian genocide of 1915 in the museum narrative.

A few concluding thoughts are in order. Firstly, the findings of this chapter should be situated in the context of two historiographical discussions: the literature on the development and construction years of the USHMM. Moses’ work on the CMHR in Canada compellingly demonstrates the paradox of public funding of national museums in liberal democracies, which invites private donations by immigrants who then pursue their desire to commemorate their ethnic heritage and trauma in the museum, thus largely identifying with their country of origin. This chapter has showcased Moses’ paradox in the context of the USHMM: the US federal ‘campaign to remember’ created a golden opportunity for many non-Jewish victims, and this opportunity was seized especially aggressively by the Armenians from California seeking to include the contested memories of the 1915 genocide in the memorial.

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<sup>68</sup> See also Washington to Jerusalem, re: the Turks and the USHMM, 5 March 1988, ISA/MFA/000A4G4/584, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

This chapter has contributed to the thesis' argument by showcasing how and why geopolitics in the Middle East, influenced by renewed bipolar tension, shaped the memory of the Armenian genocide in the American political and cultural arena of the 1980s; a critical issue given that the US was both Turkey's and Israel's most important Cold War ally. I have shown how the USHMC was influenced by the changes in the US administration, that is to say by Carter who initiated the commission in 1978 with the aim of linking the Holocaust and other genocides with genocide prevention and human rights protection as set out in the 1975 Helsinki Accords. When Reagan took charge in 1981, his administration shied away from his and Carter's earlier commitment to include the 1915 Armenian genocide in the USHMM. The renewed East-West renewed tension again provides a useful context to understand how the path of the USHMM changed as the emphasis on human rights clashed with US Cold War security interests in the Middle East, namely Turkey's role in the security alliance. This revealing point is important to understand the totality of the evidence of the last two chapters of the thesis.

Hence, the USHMM was a highly troubling project for both Turkey and Israel in the context of late Cold War diplomacy and Israeli Holocaust memory culture, and ties together some of the issues I have analysed in previous chapters. Specifically, ASALA terrorist attacks on Turkish diplomats, side by side with the Turkish humanitarian gesture to the Iranian and Syrian Jews offered Ankara some leverage with USHMM. The Turks used this leverage to make two arguments in several forums: first, the Turks were victims of the USHMM exhibition because the American and Turkish Jews were ungrateful to Turkey and the Ottoman Empire for having saved Jews. Second, in an attempt to leverage the East-West bipolar tension, Turks argued that they were victims of ongoing violence perpetrated by anti-Western Armenian terrorism affiliated with the Soviets. The above was identified by the pro-Turkish faction in the Israeli MFA as a window of opportunity to restore Israeli-Turkish relations by influencing the policies of the US with respect to the Armenian genocide.

# Chapter 8

## **Between the European Parliament and the United States**

### **Congress: Israel's Foreign Policy and the 'Armenian Question of Genocide'**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines two resolutions related to the Armenian genocide: one in the European Parliament during June 1987, and a second in the United States Congress during August 1987. First and foremost, the chapter focuses on how these resolutions were used by Israeli MFA for diplomatic leverage in Israeli-Turkish relations during the period when intensive efforts were being made towards normalisation (1985–1988). This chapter also, however, seeks to engage with and contribute to the historiographical debate exploring the tensions in re-establishing priorities between members of the Western alliance from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in the last decade of the Cold War.

Turkey was situated right in the heart of the tensions between the Western Europeans and the US; thus, the Armenian question is an important scale through which to measure the tension in the Western alliance and, in the context of the thesis, how this affected the improving Israeli-Turkish relations and the Israeli diplomats' mission to renew the synergy of this Middle Eastern alliance. This chapter aims to explore this question through these two resolutions that have so far been largely overlooked in both the literature on the Armenian genocide and the literature on the diplomatic history of the Cold War, making a contribution in both areas.

The chapter shows that there were some disagreements among the Israeli diplomats in Jerusalem, Ankara, Strasbourg and Washington, regarding the priority and resources the Armenian issue should be getting during 1987. Moreover, there were ethical and moral concerns raised by some of the Israeli diplomats seeking to disrupt the 1987 Armenian resolutions. In this chapter I argue that a group of extremely pro-Turkish Israeli diplomats worked intensively behind the scenes on both sides of the Atlantic with the aim of causing these resolutions to fail as a strategy to secure a continued improvement in Israeli-Turkish relations. While both resolutions aroused anxiety among Israeli diplomats, the American version drew stronger attention from

the Israelis. This was for two main reasons: firstly, Israel's Cold War priority of securing the Middle East and its preparedness to turn a blind eye to Turkey's human rights abuses to achieve that aim was a critical factor in explaining why the alliance of Israeli-Turkish-American relations was more important to Washington than it was to Strasbourg. Secondly, Israel's MFA was able to make a substantial difference in the US situation, given the ability of the MFA and Jewish organisations to influence US policies via lobbying in the American Congress, in contrast to its much more limited influence in Strasbourg. This chapter showcases how the regional power (Israel) was also critically important in shaping the US attitudes and policy as a superpower towards the contested memories of the Armenian genocide.

I advance the argument in three main parts: the first part charts the Armenian resolution in the European Parliament side by side with Turkey's first application to the EEC. This part shows how the Armenian resolution was adopted as a way to allow Turkey to demonstrate that it qualified in spirit for EEC membership. The second part reviews the Turkish elite's antagonistic response to the European Parliament's decision with a threat to leave NATO. This 'apocalyptic scenario' encouraged Israeli diplomats to put pressure on the subsequent Armenian resolution in the United States Congress two months later. This discussion leads to the third part, which examines the pressure exerted by pro-Turkish Israeli diplomats and Paul Berger, the same person whose hiring to influence the USHMC was described in the previous chapter. The argument that Turkey would withdraw from NATO if the United States Congress approved a National Day of Remembrance for the Armenian genocide made the crucial difference in leading to the Armenian genocide bill being rejected.

### **The European Parliament and the Armenian Genocide Resolution (February 1987)**

To recap from the first part of the thesis, in the late 1970s and early-1980s Turkey faced an economic and political crisis arising from the military coup on 12 September 1980 led by Chief of the General Staff, Kanan Evren.<sup>1</sup> After almost three years under military administration, Turgut Özal's civil administration (from late 1983) gradually improved Turkey's economic ties with the Western world, specifically with the EEC

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<sup>1</sup> Zürcher, *Turkey*, 278–337.



and the US. Side by side, Özal's administration sought to follow one of the core tenets of the military administration led by Evren to fight the Armenian related problems and Turkey's associated bad human rights image in the Western world.

Özal, therefore, counted on the argument that Turkey's military and security affinity with the West should be the grounds for Turkey's first application to the EEC in late 1986. As noted by Christopher Walker regarding the 1987 European Parliament bill "since genocide is such a serious matter any parliament of a body that refused to consider it, where it was seriously alleged against a prospective member of that body, was failing in its duty by ignoring such an allegation".<sup>2</sup> Part of the process of examining Turkey's fitness to become an EEC member, therefore, was forcing Turkey to face up to its intensive denial of the human rights consequences of its domestic and foreign policies such as with Cyprus, military coups and other related problems. One manifestation of Turkey's problems and internal tensions was the denial of the Armenian genocide.

It should be noted that although the 1987 Armenian resolutions at the European Parliament and thereafter in the United States Congress are the focal point of this chapter, these cannot be understood unless they are placed within the wider context of Turkey's first application to the EEC. Although the application process was incorporated into the events of the second chapter, this part of the current chapter deepens the understanding of how the Armenian resolution played a role in Turkey's attempt to become an EEC member. To recap, when Özal's administration decided to apply for EEC membership in late 1986, during late February 1987, the mainly Northern European countries opposed to Turkey's application drafted the Armenian genocide bill at the European Parliament foreign affairs committee. In a telegram, Israel's Chargé d'affaires in Ankara, Yehuda Milo, reported urgently about the progress of the resolution draft, noting:

The Turks have been desperately fighting against the European Parliament which was accusing them of perpetrating genocide against the Armenians. The preliminary vote at the foreign affairs committee was scheduled for the 24 February 1987. Although we have not been approached by the Turks, maybe can we still offer our aid? The Turkish diplomats have circulated

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<sup>2</sup> Walker, *Armenia*, 383.

here a booklet highlighting the tolerant attitude to the Turkish Jews along the centuries and the opening of the Empire and, later, by the Republic of Turkey. Can we somehow leverage this? Can we put to work Knesset members such as Shevah Weiss, Sarah Doron, or others? Please make sure that Turkey's representatives in Paris know about this initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Milo suggests an attempt to employ the experiences of Turkish Jews or directly to approach Knesset members who acted as members of the European Parliament sub-committee. Given that the official seat of the European Parliament was in Strasbourg, Milo does not forget to ask his peers in Jerusalem to make sure that Turkish representatives in Paris were informed about the Israeli gesture. Furthermore, according to Milo's report, the Turks had highlighted the Turkish Republic's efforts to secure the lives of Jewish refugees (hinting at the recent persecutions of Syrian and Iranian Jews and not just the acceptance of the Sephardic Jews during the Ottoman period). This input intersects with the fourth chapter of the thesis in showing the degree to which the Turks were desperate to get the acknowledgment of the Western Europeans regarding their efforts to protect the human rights of refugees, despite the accusations of genocide from the Armenian diaspora.

At the same time as Milo's telegram, another telegram was issued by the Israeli consul in Istanbul, Meir Halifa, reporting to Jerusalem regarding his meeting on the 21 February 1987 with Jeck Vassid:

The latter reported about a special forum initiated by the Istanbul governor, including Turkish diplomats and representatives of Turkish Jews, (Jack Kamhi and Jeck Vassid himself), and representatives of the Armenian community in Istanbul. The Turkish forum have guided the communities' elite about how to advocate for Turkey within international forums. At the recent meeting concerning the forthcoming Armenian genocide resolution at the European Parliament foreign affairs committee, the Jews were assigned to approach Israel's MFA asking them to pressure the European countries which plan to abstain to cast a vote against the resolution. These are the

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<sup>3</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem, Knesset Chairmen, and Istanbul, re: Armenian resolution at the European Parliament, 20 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/9494. This MFA document was suitably adapted and published in the article: Ben Aharon, "Between Ankara and Jerusalem," 464.

abstaining countries: Spain (the social democrats), Italy (socialists), United Kingdom (social democrats), Belgium (liberals), Ireland (social democrat reforms). I [Halifa] promised to forward the list to you.<sup>4</sup>

This is a direct quote from the MFA document as it stands. One must therefore assume here that the MFA correspondent (Halifa) was referring to the formal groupings of parties within the European parliament, rather than the political leaderships of the respective countries. Yitzhak Lior, at the time the general director of the MFA's Middle East Department (1983–1987), replied to Halifa's telegram, emphasising dissatisfaction about Turkey's cynical use of the Turkish Jews in such a way as to backchannel Jerusalem. Lior noted that this was totally unacceptable; a formal Israeli institution cannot back the Turks on any international forum under such circumstances. If the Turks wished to use Israel's services, this could be done only by approaching Turkey's Chargé d'affaires in Tel Aviv or Israel's Chargé d'affaires in Ankara. "Please make sure Vassid receives this message. In the meantime, we have tried to inquire about the Knesset members, but they are not attending the forthcoming sitting of the European parliament".<sup>5</sup>

A few reflections need to be highlighted in respect to the above correspondence. Firstly, the Turks' attempts to use the Turkish Jews as a backchannel to influence the European Parliament, which put Milo's telegram earlier in a different light. Ankara had not approached Israel through the formal diplomatic channels since this would immediately give some leverage to the Israelis. The Turks wanted to normalise the relations on their terms thus controlling the tempo. Rapprochement to the Israelis here has a vital sub-context: both Ankara and Jerusalem knew that this favour was a lot to ask, specifically because Israel had almost no room for manoeuvre with the Europeans. Still, if the Israelis were able to help the Turks somehow, arguably it could be something the Turks would have to 'pay' a lot for, i.e. making the normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations more publicly evident. .

Another possible reason why the Turks put this into the hands of the Turkish Jews was so that the credit for any kind of success could be split between Israel and Turkish Jews so that the Israelis could not leverage this too much. This way, Turks could still control the tempo of the improving relations without being needy. The Turks

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<sup>4</sup> Istanbul to Jerusalem et al., re: confidential, 20 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/9336, 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem to Istanbul et al., re: confidential, 22 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/9239.

also knew Vassid would respond rapidly to this request so as to make it ‘his’ and the Turkish Jews’ initiative rather than that of the Turkish MFA. Another point which comes to light again is the constant effort by the Israeli diplomats (evident in Lior’s angry response) to make sure that they harnessed all the possible credit for any aid provided to the Turks, even if this meant that they were in the end totally bypassed by the Turks.

### **The Preliminary Resolution: European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee (February 1987)**

During late February 1987, a preliminary resolution on the Armenian genocide was adopted at the European Parliament foreign affairs committee. In an urgent telegram, Milo in Ankara reported to Jerusalem about the dramatic vote as it was viewed immediately from Ankara when the Turks received the news:

The resolution has passed by a small majority of twenty-five votes in favour, with twenty-three against and two abstaining. All in all, this resolution draft was a bit more moderate than the original draft in that it does not blame the Turks for perpetrating genocide against the Armenians but asks them to revise its current policies towards its ethnic minorities. The Turkish MFA raged about this, however. Ankara claimed that this was a way to disrupt Turkish-EEC relations. Furthermore, I was approached by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Acarcali, who is the head of mission of the Armenian resolutions, asking me to help them. Acarcali noted that he was busy with lobbying against the resolution in his journey in Western European capitals but intended to approach me with this. Given the vote, they have a pretty good chance to overthrow it and thus to reject the resolution. Acarcali promised to send the list of ‘problematic’ parliament members. I said we are glad to help but I am not confident our Knesset members are attending the meetings of this committee. Whether we can make a difference or not, it is extremely important the Turks know we made our best effort to help them.<sup>6</sup>

This important document provides evidence for some of the issues this chapter has

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<sup>6</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Armenian Resolution at the European Parliament, 26 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/12358, 1–2.

raised so far. The moderate draft of the preliminary Armenian resolution emphasised the degree to which the European Parliament foreign affairs committee wanted to draw Turkish attention to minority issues, rather than naming the 1915 event as a genocide against the Armenians. The moderate draft seemed to work closely towards that aim: subject to Turkey's acknowledgment, it helped pave the way for Turkish membership of the EEC given a few revisions of current problematic policies. Building on the context the previous chapter provided about developments in the USHMM, the Turks' angry response left no doubt, however, that no matter the timing or the place, Ankara perceived this as a hostile decision. This angry Turkish response seemed to be just playing into the hands of those European countries who harboured serious doubts about whether Turkey could be a worthy member of the EEC because of its treatment of its minorities.

This document also tells us something about how Turkey's MFA prioritised the rapprochement and initial contact with Jerusalem about the resolution by using the Turkish Jews first. Acarcali justified his late message to Milo by making a lame excuse about his trip to European cities, while in reality, the Turks had known that Israel's main lobbyist influence was in Washington rather than Strasbourg. Another important point is the way in which Milo was still doing everything he could to push forward any help he could provide in respect to this resolution and how he chose not to criticise in his report to Jerusalem the way in which the Turkish MFA was using Milo and Jerusalem. Binyamin Oron, Israel's second secretary to the EEC, recalls in an oral interview:

At this point, in 1987, a request from Jerusalem arrived to help the Turks on the Armenian resolution. The MFA asked everything to be kept extremely confidential so that MFA would not upset anyone; 'the topic' [Armenian issue] was all very sensitive, also for the Jews. Everything about this had to be discreet so at one point I was asked to drive to Paris to meet someone but to leave no evidence about that meeting in a telegram. [...] I had to approach Simone Veil who then served as head of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (1982–1989). Simone was a very intelligent woman. Veil understood the sensitivity of the matter. Nevertheless, we [the embassy in Brussels] had our own problems to deal with besides the Turkish-Armenian dispute. The Western Europeans were putting pressure on us about the Golan Heights, specifically products we were importing to Europe from the

settlements and our treatment of the Palestinians; hence we were ‘accepted under conditions’.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast to Jerusalem and Ankara, Oron’s account implies that the Armenian-Turkish disputed history was something that the Israeli diplomats serving in Brussels were unhappy to be embroiled in. Oron and his peers were working on other Israeli interests at the European Parliament, such as trading agreements as a non-EEC member, Israel’s own human rights reputation, which back in the mid-late 1980s suffered from several image problems concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the pro-Turkish faction in Jerusalem and Ankara had their agenda, those in Brussels probably saw this as a distracting and problematic mission, given that Turkey was already suffering from image problems in respect to the human rights of its minorities.

One also needs to question what ability Israel, or the Jewish organisations, actually had to influence the resolution in the European Parliament. Oron further proposes in an oral interview:

Neither Israel's MFA nor the Jewish lobby had the ability to influence the European Parliament on the Armenian decision. Kamhi and Vassid from Turkey really wanted to help but this was beyond their territory, although both had great motivation to help Ankara. The European Jewish Congress definitely did not have the political power the American Jews have at the Congress.<sup>8</sup>

From Oron’s account, we can learn that Israel faced some serious challenges in respect to providing the Turks with help regarding the looming Armenian resolution. The difficulties of influencing the up-coming resolution in Brussels, however, increased the pressure and expectations on the Israeli diplomats at the American front. It is important to recap from the second chapter regarding Turkey’s application to the EEC, that even though the pro-Turkish faction had wanted to help Turkey with the Armenian resolution at the European Parliament, the Israeli diplomats in Brussels felt that it put Israel’s wider diplomatic mission with the EEC at risk. Specifically, helping the Turks could

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<sup>7</sup> Oron, 29 January 2018. Simone Veil, (1927–2017), was a Holocaust survivor and French Jewish lawyer who served as a French member of the European Parliament (1979–1991) and was also elected as president of the Parliament between 1979–1982. During the year in question (1987) Veil was a member of the Human Rights and Foreign Affairs committee.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, Oron, 29 January 2018.

act as a double-edged sword since Israeli support for Turkey in the context of the human rights concerns that formed the focus of the European Parliament resolution, simply served to provoke and validate European criticism of Israel's own problematic reputation with respect to the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By contrast, Oron's account also underlines how important it was to secure Israel's MFA grand strategy aiming towards a 'new Middle East'.

### **The European Parliament and the Armenian Resolution: Cold War Human Rights Norms and Turkey's Treatment of Minorities (Strasbourg, 18 June 1987)**

After the preliminary resolution adopted during February 1987, the next phase was the full resolution in the European Parliament, the vote in respect of which occurred on 18 June 1987. The resolution suggested "a political solution to the Armenian question".<sup>9</sup> While analysing the whole document is beyond the scope of this section, a few points which are significant to the premise of this chapter are highlighted here.

Firstly, sub-article 'G' notes that: "the recognition of the Armenian genocide by Turkey must therefore be viewed as a fundamentally humane act of moral rehabilitation towards the Armenians which can only bring honour to Turkey".<sup>10</sup> The Europeans' view was to set out the humanitarian perspectives on the Turkish denial and thus the morality of a reconciliation between Turks and Armenians; this discourse is embodied in the subsequent articles.

While human rights are no doubt stressed here, to this end sub article 'H' of the resolution proposes: "profoundly regretting and condemning the mindless terrorism by groups of Armenians who were responsible between 1973–1986 for several attacks causing death or injury to innocent victims and deplored by the overarching majority of Armenian people".<sup>11</sup> Although the resolution employed the word 'genocide', and despite the condemnation of ASALA, albeit omitting the number of sixty casualties of Turkish diplomats, the Turks could arguably look at this article as scoring an important point, namely the fact that Armenian terrorism was not justified in any way. Even more

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<sup>9</sup> "Resolution: On the Political Solution to the Armenian Question," Doc.A2-33/87, 18 June 1987, 1–3. For the full text of the 1987 Armenian resolution see it available in: [www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/euro/pcc/aag/pcc\\_meeting/resolutions/1987\\_07\\_20.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/euro/pcc/aag/pcc_meeting/resolutions/1987_07_20.pdf) (accessed 9 September 2018).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

importantly, the resolution condemned the violence by terrorists and noted that it was not supported by the ‘majority of Armenians’, which should have encouraged the Turks to believe that the European Parliament could observe the problem from both disputed parties’ point of view. Moreover, article 2 of the resolution proposed that the European Parliament:

Believes that the tragic events of 1915–1917 involving the Armenians living in the territory of the Ottoman Empire constitute genocide within the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1948; recognises, however, that the present day Turkey cannot be held responsible for the tragedy experienced by the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire and stresses that neither political nor legal or material claims against present day Turkey can be derived from the recognition of this historical event as an act of genocide.<sup>12</sup>

The impression given reading this (one of the main articles of this resolution) is the emphasis on morality, and in fact the question of the responsibility of modern Turkey for the Armenian genocide perpetrated under the Ottoman Empire is treated rather sensitively. These well-chosen words offered a route towards future Turkish membership in the EEC. To this end, the European Parliament chose to emphasise that the perpetrators were the representatives of the Ottoman Empire and not modern Turkey, hence, the latter was not accountable for any legal, political or material claims made by the Armenians. If this is the case, what is left then? The focus is on the moral and human rights norms and the question of minorities in Turkey. This goes to show that although the Western Europeans were encouraging Özal’s government to recognise the 1915 events as genocide, they also wanted to use this possible recognition as an instrument to solve Turkey’s deeper problems with respect to ethnic minorities’ rights. Furthermore, applying the 1948 UNGC reiterated the Western Europeans’ commitment to the human rights regime established in the late 1940s. This is a critical point in assessing the resolution in the context of the Cold War tension mentioned at the outset of this chapter.

In the oral interview with Avi Primor, Israel’s Ambassador to the EEC (1987–

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2.



1993), he considers the Armenian genocide of 1915 as not being the main obstacle for Turkey's EEC membership:

The Armenian genocide was not the hottest topic on the table for the Western Europeans amid their concerns about the Turkish application. The question casting doubt 'behind the scenes' of this application was: 'how European is Turkey?' In other words, the fact that a very small part of its geography is within the continent of Europe does not constitute Turkey as European. And, after all, the EU is European. But, what really bothered the Western Europeans was the 'biggest elephant in the room': the fact that Turkey is Muslim. Some might say 'Albania had the same problem', but, Albania is not Turkey in terms of population growth. While Turkey is a Muslim country and demographically only growing and growing, Europe, excluding France and Sweden, is consistently shrinking demographically. These were 'behind the scenes' issues with Turkey's application of 1987.<sup>13</sup>

Primor's account is compelling if we consider that the Armenian genocide resolution was not Turkey's biggest problem during its first application to become an EEC member. Given the other problems listed by Primor, which were essentially impossible for Turkey to change, the style of the resolution seems to make a step forward in helping the Turks by highlighting more substantial matters that promised scope for improvement. A Turkish acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide and associated serious revisions to its human rights norms and treatment of minorities might be used as evidence that Turkey was indeed a suitable candidate for the EEC.

Underscoring the Cold War and human rights dimension, article eleven "Condemns the violations of individual freedoms committed in the Soviet Union against the Armenian populations".<sup>14</sup> The European Parliament used the Armenian resolution to point out the immense differences in the treatment of minorities and the freedom of the individual (or, in other words, human rights), between the Eastern and the Western blocs, showcasing thereby the Western European human rights DNA within the context of the Cold War rivalry. Here I should also return to the subject of the Helsinki Accords, and how this article is stressing the differences in East-West

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, Primor, 12 February 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Doc.A2-33/87, 18 June 1987, 2.

views of human rights. Even though during détente the Helsinki Accords were meant to represent an understanding regarding how keeping those rights were essential to maintaining peace. This article reiterates that there were differences in how the East and the West saw these values in the 1980s. This point, although limited in scope in the text, is important to the argument of the chapter. The Western Europeans attempted here to distinguish their norms from that of the Soviets, and it was in this context that this example in particular was used as another method to raise the bar of what was expected of Turkey.

Lastly, there was another point which needs to be addressed: the Jewish perspective, and specifically the Holocaust. Article number 13 proposed “Calls on the community Members States to dedicate a day to the memory of the genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the Armenians and the Jews”.<sup>15</sup> This proposal had a sharply focused purpose. Oron recalls in an oral interview that the article was incorporated into the text at the last minute to calm down some people who thought that the Jews should be included there mainly to show Turkey that the European Parliament was not condemning only the Turks for the Armenians, but also perpetrators of other genocides.<sup>16</sup>

What Oron suggested in his account above could have been fully admissible if the word ‘Germans’ was specifically included in the resolution text. That, of course, as the USHMM chapter demonstrated, would have made the Turks even angrier, putting them side by side with the Nazi perpetrators. It is hard to decipher what was the main objective was of including the reference to the Jews in the text, although what Oron suggests could be right after all. As it reads, however, the West European Jews might not be satisfied with undermining the suffering of Jewish victims by offering an inclusive category to Jews and Armenians. It hints that the Holocaust is not a distinct genocide, which should be under the title ‘Holocaust’. Arguably, a Jewish lobby group was not the origin of this initiative to include the Jews in the text.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview, Oron, 29 January 2018; Brussels to Jerusalem and Ankara, re: European Parliament and Turkey, 19 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/11759.

## **Turkey, NATO and the European Parliament's Armenian Resolution: Between Strasbourg and Washington DC**

Not surprisingly, the Armenian resolution was not accepted with warm applause by Turkey's elite. Although the wording of the resolution indeed attempted to propose reconciliation between Turks and Armenians, the 1915 genocide was acknowledged mainly to test the Turkish elite's willingness to revise some of its policies in an effort to qualify Turkey for EEC membership. All that being said, given Turkey's absolute denial of the Armenian genocide, the European Parliament resolution was perceived first and foremost as hostile to Turkey and as an insult to Turkishness. The resolution was, as the Turks interpreted it, an official rejection of Turkey's first application to the EEC, but beyond that, as a defining moment in respect to Turkey's Western orientation, and as a threat to Turkey's national security. Twenty-four hours after the resolution, Özal condemned the decision:

The fact that unjust accusations and demands concerning Cyprus and the Aegean which have nothing to do with the Armenian issue have also found their way into the resolution proves who are behind the Armenian extremism. [...] History already bears witness to the great tolerance, generosity and compassion shown by the Turkish nation towards minorities throughout centuries. Turkey has no lesson to learn from anyone on the question of human rights. Such racist and hostile Resolutions cannot have any impact on Turkey which has never bowed before pressure in history and does not intend to do so in the future. The Turkish nation as a whole feels great indignation at this wretched conspiracy directed against it. If the Armenian terrorists commit new crimes against Turkey and begin to shed blood following the engorgement provided by this turn of events the blame will lie squarely with the European Parliament and in particular with those who voted for this Resolution. We will continue to expose this responsibility everywhere and on every occasion.<sup>17</sup>

This declaration draws upon Turkey's hard-line position. It not only undermines the European decisions about genocide but portrays the resolution as an insult to

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<sup>17</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Statement Made by the Prime Minister, 19 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/265, 1-2

Turkishness. Above all it condemns an incentive to Armenian terrorism which, as we already know from chapter two, had drawn the Western world's attention to the contested memories of the genocide. I should also note here that each of the parties clearly refer to the parts of the past that help to advance their premise: the Turks showcasing the alleged tolerance to Jews during Ottoman period, while the European Parliament emphasised the genocidal crimes of the 1915, as discrete from Kemalist history. The separation inherent in that helped the European Parliament's bill to underline that while the liability for committing the Armenian genocide lay with the Ottoman Empire, the moral recognition should be made by Turkey. Furthermore, as in the previous chapter on the USHMM, one of the unfortunate outcomes of the ASALA terrorist campaign was that it gave the Turks the chance to present themselves as the victims and the Armenians as perpetrators. According to Özal, there is no question of human rights violations in Turkey.

As a coincidence or not, one day after the Armenian resolution was adopted a terrorist attack took place in Eastern Turkey: PKK terrorists killed thirty Turkish citizens including sixteen children and six women. Leaders of Turkey's political parties across the political landscape, as well as the Turkish media, saw this terrorist attack as directly linked to the European Parliament decision, which they saw as helping the Kurds with their nationalist and territorial aspirations in North East Turkey.<sup>18</sup> Complementary to Özal's statement, a few days later, the former Chief of the General Staff of Turkey and Turkey's President (1980–1989) Kenan Evren decided to escalate the crisis further, questioning the NATO alliance and sending a clear threat regarding Turkey's immediate reactions to the Armenian resolution:

We are members of the NATO alliance. The alliance was established to protect the integrity of its members. The members of this alliance, while protecting their land's integrity, want to take some of Turkey's territory and give it to others. Even the Warsaw Pact has no such demands. This comes from Greece and from other alliance member countries. [...] When it comes to Europe's defence, then Turkey and Turkish soldiers are most heroic. [...] Turkey will be included within NATO, the OECD and European council, but when it comes to the EEC she will not. What lies

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<sup>18</sup> Jerusalem to Washington D.C et al., re: Turkey, 25 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/14859,2; Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Turkey and the West, 23 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ, 1–2.

beneath this is religious discrimination. Because they are all Christians and we are Muslims. If this is the case then we will benefit from reviewing the NATO alliance. [...] Let me tell you what's behind it all. We applied to the EEC and it is then that these started. So that we could not join in. [...] The issue will not end here. Later they will say give back the territories to the Armenians.<sup>19</sup>

Evren's straightforwardly anti-Western response activated all the US's Cold War fears. The difference between Özal and Evren was that the latter suggested more practical steps as a reaction to the European Parliament resolution: Turkey's withdrawal from NATO. As Özal did, Evren underlined how and why the resolution could encourage terrorism, but added another dimension of the terrorist period; namely, ASALA's claims for some revisions of Turkey's borders as a by-product of Turkey's recognition of the Armenian genocide. Evren, nevertheless, knew that the Congress resolution was looming and captured neatly the tension between the Europeans and the Armenians and the Cold War Western dilemma. In other words, Evren pointed to national security protection (the American core)—'our soldiers all heroes'—while attacking the Western Europeans via the EEC for rejecting Muslim Turkey as part of Christian Europe: 'we are not good enough'.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Evren is quite frank in his account, knowing that Muslim integration into Christian Europe was a key factor here. More importantly perhaps is Evren's knowledge that the resolution was still pending in the US Congress and thus his words seem to have been aimed at Washington as much as Strasbourg.

The speech by Evren goes to show a selective approach to human rights: the irony is that when needed, Turkey was keen to demonstrate its commitment to human rights as a core component of foreign policy, for decades rescuing Jews during the WWII and Iranian and Syrian Jews. In other words, when Turkey needed to advocate against the accusation of genocide before the organisers of the 1982 conference, or the USHMC, it emphasised its human rights credentials. On the other hand, when it was being asked to acknowledge its genocidal past, resentment and anger overshadowed its previously professed concern for human rights.

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<sup>19</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Evren Warns NATO, 22 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/265, 1–3

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

### **Israeli Anxieties and the ‘Apocalyptic Scenario’**

The severe statements above, especially the latter by Evren, provoked anxiety among Israeli diplomats in Jerusalem and Ankara who reported in detail the Turkish antagonistic response to the European Parliament resolution. First to respond was Milo in Ankara who expressed his deep concerns reading Evren’s speech and recounting his views about the Turkish response in Ankara. Milo noted:

President Evren is a former military general and has been famous for supporting the Kemalist ideology at any cost. Evren has always sought to highlight Turkey’s importance to the West, thus as an integral part of the Western alliance. [...] However, in the context of the rifts and the friction between Turkey and the Western camp, Evren has been driven to harshly criticise Turkey’s Western allies. And the Kurdish terror attack two days after the European Parliament Armenian resolution was adopted, killing thirty citizens in Eastern Turkey, helps the Turks’ counter argument that the Western Europeans’ decision ‘encourages terrorism’. The impression across Turkey’s political landscape is that this is an ‘international conspiracy’ aimed to strike Turkey where it is most vulnerable. But, the apocalyptic scenario of Turkey leaving NATO is still far off.<sup>21</sup>

The casual impression when reading this Israeli MFA document is Milo’s anxious tone and his attempt to pick up any nugget of information regarding President Evren’s threat to leave NATO. Perhaps the reason for Milo’s anxiety lay in the pressure he thought was coming based on his experience as an Israeli diplomat serving in Ankara, just as Oron, viewing the Turkish drama from Brussels, had a more relaxed tone. Certainly, the pressure each diplomat felt was stimulated by his geographic location. But given that Milo was a dominant voice in the pro-Turkish faction, his ability precisely to communicate to his peers in Jerusalem the atmosphere of great concern in Ankara meant that his message was heeded. Accordingly, the Israeli MFA exerted great pressure in respect to the bill in the United States Congress, as reported in the final part of this chapter.

Beyond the bill in the United States Congress, as discussed in the third chapter on ASALA, this document should be read in the context of the international forum on

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<sup>21</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., 23 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ, 1–2.

counter-terrorism involving both Israeli and Turkish diplomats that took place on 23 June 1987. That event brought together representatives from the research departments within both the Israeli and Turkish MFAs to exchange knowledge and intelligence regarding anti-Turkish/anti-Israeli terrorism, including Armenian, Kurdish and Palestinian terror organisations. The forum was initiated in late 1985 by Gürün. Later, Milo adopted Gürün's initiative and actually brought the forum about. This is an important context to Milo's report above in that it took place in the period between the European Parliament and United States Congress resolutions. The forum on counter-terrorism underlines even more how the fear articulated by Milo and the other pro-Turkish members of the Israeli MFA was justified since if the Americans were to recognise the Armenian genocide, all the hard work invested so far in restoring the relations could be for nothing. This constitutes another major intersection between the previous chapters of this thesis, uniting each aspect of the related Armenian genocide campaign as a means to restore the Israeli-Turkish relations. In an oral interview, Avi Primor evaluated whether Turkey's threats to leave NATO in 1987 were credible, concluding that NATO was far too important for Turkey to leave at that point:

From the Europeans' point of view, Turkey leaving NATO was not really a European problem, but an American one. Still, being part of NATO was more in the interests of the Turks than the Americans. The Turks had a long-running dispute with the Soviets. The Americans took care of their own needs here. Although in Washington the administration knew about Turkey needing NATO, but they could have said 'we have nothing to worry about with Turkey, they need us more than we need them' however, the Americans were not indifferent about this.<sup>22</sup>

A few days after Milo's telegram above, Lior responded, adding his own concerns:

we do not want to think what the implications would be, and the reactions Turkey would have, if a similar resolution were to be adopted by the American Congress. Surely, the American administration already had the red flashing lights on their screens even before the European Parliament

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, Primor, 12 February 2018.

resolution was adopted, but for sure now.<sup>23</sup>

Milo and Lior understood that now the Washington front had become even more important than before, not only for the purposes of continuing the positive momentum in Israeli-Turkish relations but also for constructing 'the new Middle East' as Liel put it earlier. As Milo noted quite dramatically, the 'apocalyptic scenario' meant that the possibility of Turkey leaving NATO would change the balance of power in the Middle East. Additionally, Lior's assertion that Washington was already concerned about the European Parliament resolution seems a bit hopeless, more trying to convince himself, given that the Western Europeans did not incorporate any of the American concerns into the resolution draft.

A week later, Milo reported to Jerusalem regarding his urgent meeting in Ankara with Onur Öymen, who was Turkey's pivot man on the Armenian resolutions. Although this was not mentioned earlier by the Israeli diplomats in any MFA records, apparently there was a secret agreement about the Israeli help on the Armenian issue. Milo, therefore, had drawn Öymen's attention to the extent to which Israel's MFA was disappointed with Turkish diplomats disclosing Israel's help on the Armenian resolution in Brussels and Strasbourg to other parties, even though it was well known to the Turks how sensitive keeping this help discreet was for Israel and for the American and Jewish elite. Specifically, it was against the rules of the game adopted and agreed upon earlier by both diplomatic missions (Israeli and Turkish).<sup>24</sup>

Öymen responded to Milo's accusations and rejected most of them. Namely, the Turkish diplomats were actually very discreet about the help provided by Israel. Otherwise, Öymen wanted to thank the Israeli diplomats who made a difference, causing a few Jewish and non-Jewish European Parliament members to change their vote. Öymen emphasised how Washington was now more important than ever, asking the Israeli MFA to do anything possible to thwart the Congress resolution.<sup>25</sup> Milo reported to Jerusalem that the sentiment in Congress seemed quite against Turkey, but Israel would do the best it could to cause the resolution to fail. After discussing all the

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<sup>23</sup> Jerusalem to Istanbul et al., re: Armenian Resolution in the Congress, 25 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/14859, 1–3

<sup>24</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Conversation with Onur Öymen, 'extremely secret document', 29 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AQ/266, 1–2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2.



practicalities, Milo inquired if the Turks actually planned to follow through with Evran's threat to leave NATO; Öymen replied: "the situation is worse than foreign experts evaluate".<sup>26</sup> The impression is that Öymen had recognised that the Israelis were extremely worried about the possibility of Turkey's executing the 'apocalyptic scenario'. Öymen thus leveraged this a bit further to make sure the Israelis knew what was at stake in Washington.

### **The United States Congress and the Armenian Genocide Resolution, February 1987**

A short methodological note on the Armenian genocide Resolution bill at the American Congress is needed before analysing the events of June-August 1987. This bill was first introduced in 1985 to the House of Representatives, suggesting that 24 April on each calendar year would be a day of remembrance for Armenian victims of the 1915 genocide. The 1985 resolution bill was rejected by the House of Representatives, however. There are no archival records at the ISA hinting at any back-channelling by the Israeli diplomats/Jewish American organisations regarding the 1985 bill.<sup>27</sup> That being said, in the line of argument of the thesis, one can reasonably assume that help was provided by Israeli diplomats/Jewish organisations to the Turks which was voted on and rejected by the House of Representatives. At the time of writing, the ISA had declassified only a few records of the 1987 resolution, however. As with chapter six, therefore, we are reliant entirely on the ISA's limited declassified materials which cast some light on the 1987 resolution, which have to be contextualised through oral historical accounts and what we know about the European Parliament resolution and Turkey's application to the EEC. Together this can provide a coherent picture, albeit one limited in scope to the efforts of Israeli diplomats.

The 1987 Armenian resolutions on both sides of the Atlantic were undertaken in different local political settings: i.e. Turkey qualifying for a membership to the EEC, set against legislation on national Remembrance Day in the US. If context counts then one should note that this is a critical difference. Both resolutions, however, seek to acknowledge a particular fact: that the 1915 events constituted a genocide based on the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See the short discussion on the 1985 resolution bill 1985: Bloxham, *The Great Game*, 221; Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation*, 384.

UNGC. Given that the convention is built upon the post-war human rights regime, it inevitably activated the question of human rights norms and, on that basis, both the European Parliament and US Congress should have acknowledged the Armenian genocide in 1987. In reality, however, the question of human rights norms was stressed more by the Western Europeans, but much less by Reagan's administration. Critically reflecting on the 1987 resolutions, (European Parliament and US Congress) the US Secretary of State George Shultz (1982–1989) noted:

There is no doubt that HJR 132 [the resolution before Congress] would very seriously damage US-Turkish relations. The Resolution is seen in Turkey as an endorsement of Armenian terrorism and a precursor of demands for repatriations and eventual territorial dismemberment. So perceived, HJR 132—like its predecessor in 1985 and like the European Parliament's recent resolution—generates anger, resentment and hostility across the political spectrum in Turkey.<sup>28</sup>

The above statement by Shultz opened a much better opportunity for the Israeli MFA and American Jews to influence the US resolution rather than the European decision. As in the case of the European Parliament earlier in this chapter, the wheels of the resolution were set in motion already in February 1987.<sup>29</sup> Neville Lamdan, Israeli MFA special representative to the US Congress (1984–1989), reported that “the initiators of the bill have tried to sign patrons to support their initiative, our connection in the relevant committee continues to follow up closely on this and report”.<sup>30</sup> To recap from the previous chapter, during 1980, the American-Armenian from California, Set Momjian, decided to donate \$1 million US dollars to the USHMM in the name of his community. The motives of those proposing the bill—as in the case of the USHMM wishing to include the memory of the Armenian genocide in the exhibition—were to promote their ethnic heritage as US immigrants.

Two weeks later, Milo replied from Ankara to Lamdan that the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister, Bülent Aycarlı, was planning his visit to Washington on 29 March

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<sup>28</sup> Armenian Mirror-Spectator, 25 July, 15 August 1987.

<sup>29</sup> House Joint Resolution, (HJR), 132 “Designing the 24 April 1987 as a day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Armenian Genocide.” 4 February 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 1–2.

<sup>30</sup> Washington to Ankara and Jerusalem, re: A Day of Remembrance to the Armenian Massacre, 3 March 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 1.

1987 and had shown interest in meeting with the Israeli delegation. The aim was to see what could be done against the looming resolution in Congress.<sup>31</sup> A few weeks later, during April, Lamdan reported on progress to Jerusalem and Ankara: “As we predicted, the Armenian resolution was adopted by the sub-committee of the ‘Civil Service at the US Congress’, which means the bill of resolution is not to be discussed in the House of Representatives before 1 June 1987”.<sup>32</sup>

The preliminary adoption of the resolution heated things up in Jerusalem and Ankara. In late April, Lior wrote to Lamdan that the Turks were now claiming that the Armenian resolution had much deeper long-term national and territorial implications beyond the actual vote. Lior asked Lamdan to give this information to Paul Berger and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (hereafter AIPAC) representatives. Lior noted “the resolution was initiated by Senator Ford's committee. Ford reveals himself as an anti-Turkish individual, which is totally news for us and the Turks, respectively. We [Israel] did not expect this which now somewhat makes our mission more difficult than previously expected”.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond the stressful tone adopted by Lior, what seems revealing in Lior's report is how he describes the Turkish and Israeli diplomats as equally facing this problem, thereby working as ‘a team’, as it was perceived by Lior and the other pro-Turkish faction in the Israeli MFA. While MFA only had limited ability to influence the Western Europeans on human rights norms it had much greater influence over the Americans, especially in relation to Cold War security questions. All that being said, Lior faced new realities in Washington.

Coming closer to June 1987, Lamdan reported to Jerusalem that although there was no substantial progress with the Armenian resolution since the report in late April, it was likely that proponents of the resolution in both houses of Congress (Senate and House of Representatives) were still collecting voters to support the resolution, including those of Jewish members. But, “as you may know, we are not doing much to stop this, and I think we should not strive to stop this in the future. [...] All in all, it seems that the day has come close, and we should not underestimate the chances the

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<sup>31</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Armenian Resolution, 16 March 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/8176; Jerusalem to Washington D.C et al., re: confidential, 17 March 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/3763.

<sup>32</sup> Washington to Ankara and Jerusalem, re: Congress, Armenians, 14 April 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP.

<sup>33</sup> Jerusalem to Washington D.C et al., re: Turkey at the Congress, 29 April 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/271.

Armenians have with this, considering their support on both houses of the Congress”.<sup>34</sup> There is no specific evidence explaining this change. Lamdan’s telegram does not provide commentary as to why the Israeli mission in Washington should not seek to prevent the resolution at that point. More than anything, Lamdan seemed to have low expectations from Washington. Lamdan’s oral interview further explains what was happening behind the scenes:

The American law specifically states who can become a lobbyist. AIPAC could lobby regarding this resolution because they have been a registered as an official lobby firm, but we [MFA] could not do any official lobbying because we are diplomats. Although we have been trained to work in the American political setting, there are very clear things we could or could not do; the Armenian resolution belong to the things we could not do. We needed to change the senators’ decision making on the Armenian issue, and that was a very difficult thing to do. Furthermore, the matter I was working on was completely different at that time: I was chosen to make Israel become ‘a non-NATO ally’ meaning, we can get NATO’s arms trading prices, but we do not have to join NATO; i.e. we do not lose our independence to make our national security decisions, which NATO allies need to sacrifice to become part of the alliance. By 1986 Israel was labelled as ‘major strategic asset’ to the US. That was Yitzhak Rabin’s (Israel’s Defence Minister at that time) secret mission for me and I was chosen to carry this out at the Congress; I was able to achieve this goal, finally. I mention this because it was overlapping with the Armenian issues in the Congress during 1987.<sup>35</sup>

Lamdan’s oral account reveals—as previously in the chapter with Oron—that the geographic location they served influenced the priority given by Israeli diplomats to the Armenian factor. While Oron in Brussels was struggling with minimising the Western European criticism of Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Lamdan in

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<sup>34</sup> Washington to Ankara and Jerusalem, re: Congress, Armenians, 2 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/051.

<sup>35</sup> Oral interview with Neville Lamdan, 29 January 2018, Mevasseret Zion, Israel. It should be noted that during our oral interview Lamdan showed me an original letter written by Yitzhak Rabin thanking Lamdan for his contribution to the secret mission of making Israel ‘a non-NATO ally’. The letter was framed and signed on Lamdan’s office wall.

Washington was upgrading Israel from ‘a non-NATO ally’ to ‘major strategic asset’. This explains why both Oron and Lamdan gave the Armenian resolutions lower priority than the pro-Turkish faction. Furthermore, Lamdan’s oral account provides an inside look at the behind the scenes issues that the formal diplomatic correspondence cannot provide. The first part of Lamdan’s account reads more like an excuse, given all the previous MFA documents which uncover Israel’s MFA work behind the scenes of the USHMM, which was a federal project, even though there was some inconvenience about stretching the limits of lobbying that are forbidden for foreign diplomats in a US political setting. In his second part, Lamdan reveals why he was not so pleased to cooperate by sharing his secret mission to the Congress. Lamdan was lobbying for something else, which seemed to his eyes much more important. Ironically, Lamdan and the Israeli pro-Turkish faction diplomats who were so keen to help the Turks, had a mutual interest namely Israel’s relations with NATO, but in this instance their diplomatic missions clashed.

After clarifying these matters at the Washington front, business was proceeding as usual in Jerusalem and Ankara. Lior asked Milo to lower Ankara's expectations by delivering the unfortunate recent news from Washington. Lior also asked Milo to remind the Turks about the binding agreement both ministers had about the Armenian resolution (which was broken in Strasbourg). “Although we wish to help as much possible, if the truth about this project comes to light, we are facing a major scandal, in Israel and abroad”.<sup>36</sup> This seems to be Lior acknowledging that the odds of success in helping the Turks were low, so he was already calculating the possible damage if the Armenian resolution indeed passed as expected. The dynamic between the Israeli diplomats here is striking in the sense that the Israeli diplomats who were located in Washington could control the information, and the manner in which it was delivered to Jerusalem to make sure that Lamdan et al. had the space to focus on their own missions. Now, through Lamdan’s oral account we can also understand what drove these different priorities.

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<sup>36</sup> Jerusalem to Ankara, re: Armenian resolution in the US, extremely confidential, 6 June 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/364.

### **National Day for Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide (July 1987)**

In contrast to the European Parliament draft resolution, there are not many revealing details in the Congress draft. In many ways, the American bill emphasised the need for closure for the Armenians, rather than asking the Turks to revise their policies or human rights norms or making reparations to the Armenians. Thus, the bill only aimed to legislate a 'National Day for Remembrance of the Armenian genocide'.

Firstly, the resolution draft put forward by the 'post office and civil service committee' addressed a short history of the remembrance of the Armenian genocide in the US during the late 1970s and 1980s to justify the need for the resolution and a 'National Day for Remembrance'. Namely, the resolution focused on the USHMM council's decision to include the memory of the Armenian genocide in the USHMM memorial exhibition for educational purposes.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, the bill mentioned the US Presidents Carter and Reagan, who each addressed the events of 1915 as genocide during their administration; as Carter noted on 16 May 1978: "in the years preceding 1916, there was a concerted effort made to eliminate all Armenian people".<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Reagan's statement on 22 April 1981 – "like the genocide of the Armenians before it [...] the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten".<sup>39</sup> is also mentioned in the bill.

The short bill draft did not elaborate at any point on the Kurdish or Cyprus questions, nor did it raise any doubts the Americans might have had about minority rights or human rights policies in modern Turkey. The bill mainly reflected the need to do justice for the Armenians, based on the concern for minority politics in the US to promote their ethnic heritage as US immigrants. Asking the Turks to make any revisions to their policies, however, was not even mentioned in the above text. More importantly, given that the European Parliament resolution was adopted only a few weeks earlier, it was ignored by the resolution initiators which is surprising given that they could have used this as grounds for their claim. This underlines once again, the differences between Washington and Strasbourg on the 1987 Armenian resolution bill.

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<sup>37</sup> HJR, 132 "Designing the 24 April 1987 as a Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923", 23 July 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

### **Opposing the Bill: NATO, Turkey and the Question of Genocide**

A group of four American Congressmen, Frank Horton, John T. Mayers, Gene Taylor and Dan Burton drafted a letter entitled ‘Minority Views on the House Resolution 132’ as an appendix attached to the draft resolution; it was sent to the committee members. The letter outlined many of the concerns outlined during this chapter, but also, somewhat surprisingly, reinforced the Turkish bold denial of the 1915 genocide. Specifically, the anxiety of some of these Congressmen, as with the Israelis, centred on the ‘apocalyptic scenario’ of Turkey leaving NATO following the announcement of a ‘National Day for Remembrance of the Armenian genocide’. As Frank Horton et al. wrote:

[We] oppose House Joint Resolution 132. This resolution does not constitute a simple commemorative. Its provisions are the subject of intense historical debate and controversy. Enactment could have a serious impact on our relations with Turkey—a trusted ally—and hence on the NATO alliance around which we and all member nations depend for our security. [...] As with all wars the war that dissolved the Ottoman Empire was a tragedy. The senseless killings of hundreds of thousands of Armenians—in Eastern Turkey especially—was a tragedy. The violence that took the lives of two million Turkish soldiers, man, women, and children was a tragedy. Indeed, this was a great war. A great tragedy. [...] Genocide is a very serious and abominable crime. We believe it is the height of crimes against humanity. [...] the Holocaust of the Jews in World War II was genocide.<sup>40</sup>

It was not just that these Congressmen were denying the Armenian genocide by questioning whether it was in fact a genocide, they were also singling out the Holocaust as a solid case of genocide based on many empirical pieces of evidence. In doing so, Frank Horton and his colleagues included in their account a few other important issues to be considered by the committee:

Turkey is, without question, the poorest of our NATO allies. Yet, Turkey contributes a substantial amount of its GNP [Gross National Product] to

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<sup>40</sup> Appendix to the resolution draft: Frank Horton et al., “Minority Views on the House Resolution 132.”, 23 July 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 4.

meeting its NATO defence commitments. Turkey shares the largest common border of any NATO ally with the Soviet Union. Its location for intelligence and monitoring is obvious. It is also the home of the largest US base between Italy and the Philippines. [...] For others, however, enactment of this resolution gives aura of legitimacy to even more senseless killings. A worldwide network of Armenian extremists whose principle goals are: (1) recognition of the genocide, (2) reparations by the present Turkish government and (3) relinquishing by Turkey of certain lands for the formation of an Armenian state, would use this resolution to legitimise and continue the record of violence that has claimed the lives of more than 70 people around the world including 40 Turkish diplomats. Some of these murders were committed on American soil.<sup>41</sup>

Frank Horton's letter was supplemented by another letter written to the committee by a Jewish Congressman, Stephen J Solarz. His letter was attached as an appendix to the resolution draft. Solarz, as noted earlier, a pivot for the Israeli MFA in Washington DC, wrote a letter in December 1980 urging the Turkish government to reconsider the Turkish MFA's decision officially to downgrade the diplomatic representation with Israel from Second Secretary to Chargé d'affaires. In his letter to the committee, although not boldly denying the Armenian genocide as the above Congressmen did, Solarz clearly outlines the problems which the US would have to face if the Armenian bill were to be enacted:

Turkey is, in many respects the key to our southern flank to NATO. Through its control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles it gives us the capacity to protect the Sixth Fleet, which in turn gives us the ability to maintain naval supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. With the second largest army in the alliance, Turkey also makes a very significant contribution to the conventional balance of power in Europe. Earlier this year, Turkey signed the DECA with the United States, which provides the US with access to vitally important facilities in their country. I have been advised by the Turkish ambassador to the US, Şükrü Elekdağ, that the passage of this resolution coming on top of a large aid cut to Turkey, might

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5.



well lead to such extensive public criticism in the Turkish media of the United States that the Turkish Government would feel obligated to repudiate the DECA. Clearly, this would not be in the interests of the United States.<sup>42</sup>

A few particular comments need to be highlighted in respect to both appendices; firstly, both should be considered as a peace offering to Turkish President Evren, and to Prime Minister Özal. Both letters directly grapple with Evren's and Özal's claims casting serious doubts about their commitment to NATO. Secondly, these letters, without any doubt, served American interests in the Middle East, but beyond that, served the broad Israeli interests in the region. This was done without explicitly mentioning Israel's name in the text. One could safely propose that if, for the sake of argument, those letters were written by Lior and Milo, they would emphasise the same points (mainly about NATO). Third, in Congressman Frank Horton's notes there is a bold attempt to deny the Armenian genocide, which also seems a desperate attempt overtly to take the Turkish side. Lastly, one cannot ignore how ASALA keeps coming back into the frame even though the terrorist attacks had stopped a few years earlier. As in the USHMM, the Turks keep highlighting the terrorist threat by Armenians, presenting a vote for the resolution as a reward for terrorism against Turkey. The Armenian terror argument had served the Turks before, and was now used an instrument by the opposing Congressmen who leveraged the Armenian terror as a shared concern with Ankara; as noted in the second chapter, Armenian terrorism was a shared concern with Israel too. From the Armenian perspective, it should be stressed how, at this point in time, Armenian acts of terror such as killing Turkish diplomats were a double-edged sword: undoubtedly, they helped to internationalise the forgotten Armenian genocide that probably would never have come to the forefront of the international arena during the 1970s and 1980s otherwise. That said, it allowed the Turks to argue that they were the victims of the Armenians (at least partly), and this argument in the context of wider concerns about national security, counter terrorism, and NATO worked to support Turkey's, and Israel's, position.

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<sup>42</sup> Appendix to the resolution draft: Stephen J Solarz, "Additional Views of Congressman Stephen J Solarz on House Joint Resolution 132, Man's Inhumanity to Man", 23 July 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 6–9.

## **The Failure of the Resolution (August 1987)**

On 7 August 1987 Oded Eran, the deputy chief of the Israeli embassy in Washington DC reported to Jerusalem in a concise and simple manner: “upon the committee’s final vote on the resolution, the initiators failed to pass the bill, which means the topic is out of our sight for a while. Congratulations”.<sup>43</sup> Eran wrote briefly just to forward the important news to his peers in Ankara and Jerusalem, but his note of congratulations appears to distance him from the news: congratulating them but excluding himself from the achievement.

Meanwhile, in Ankara, Milo wrote to Jerusalem that Kamhi [Jack], had called the embassy to thank the Israeli diplomats for their involvement and fast intervention in Congress's decision. Milo also noted to Lior “Kamhi promised to make sure that the ‘local office’ [Turkish MFA] knows about our hard work. Of course, [ambassador] Elekdağ, has been informed about our hard work. As I write these words, however, I did not hear from them a word of thank you”.<sup>44</sup> It was not only the Israeli diplomats who celebrated the victory in the Congress. Paul Berger, the American Jewish lawyer who was hired by Kamhi to lobby for the Turks in Washington DC, as noted in the previous chapter, wrote a detailed report to Kamhi about his work behind the scenes:

By a vote of 201–189 the House of Representatives defeated a procedural measure; [...] Forty-two members did not vote, and one member voted ‘present’. A copy of the roll-call vote and a separate list of how Jewish members voted are attached. [...] Eight of these nine Jewish members were not co-sponsors of the Armenian resolution and were the focus of our most intensive lobbying efforts. We have attached a list of these members along with their addresses and draft thank you letters. [...] While proponents of the Armenian resolution can continue to argue that the house should consider the measure, its failure to gain consideration may dissuade making another attempt.<sup>45</sup>

Berger’s account reads not just as description of the intensive lobbying efforts

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<sup>43</sup> Washington to Ankara and Jerusalem, re: Armenian Decision, 7 August 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/4445. I have approached via email and phone to Oded Eran asking permission to meet him for an oral interview, but unfortunately he refused.

<sup>44</sup> Ankara to Jerusalem et al., re: Decision, 11 August 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP/10090.

<sup>45</sup> Paul S. Berger to Jack Kamhi, re: House Consideration of H.J Res. 132, 11 August 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 1–2.

conducted by his law firm on Jewish Congress members, but that this success also meant it would be hard in future to raise enough votes for another round. That was—along with the successes with the USHMM—great testimony to Berger’s work. Furthermore, in Berger’s letter to Kamhi, an appendix outlined how the Jewish Congressmen voted: eight voted ‘no’ the resolution, nineteen voted ‘yes’ and two did not cast a vote.<sup>46</sup> The above means that each of the ten Jewish members who voted against or did not vote on the Armenian resolution could have made a difference in such a tight vote. These Jewish members could have won the resolution for the Armenians. Although it seems that, ‘de facto’, Berger’s law firm’s lobbying efforts changed the votes of the Jewish Congress members, the Israeli diplomats, specifically Milo and Lior et al., were responsible for some of the manoeuvres behind the scenes in Washington. Based on the empirical evidence, their input was mainly in making the Turks believe that they were doing a lot for them by pressurising the nonstate agencies, namely, the Jewish lobby (American, Turkish) about the vote, as well as by using their own Israeli connections in the Congress (Lamdan) to monitor the progress of the resolution and to identify ‘problematic’ voters who could be moved to Berger’s list for more intensive lobbying.

### **Diplomatic Credit: Who Should be Rewarded?**

Focusing on the Israeli MFA and its diplomats, who had to work hard to block the Armenian resolution, or at least make the Turks believe that they had done a lot, the credit for diplomatic success was not a trophy everyone sought to claim. Eran has summarised:

First and foremost, I felt very uncomfortable—making efforts to block enactment of Day for Remembrance of the Armenian genocide—nevertheless what was the circumstance? It is not something a representative of the Jewish state should be involved in. [...] I think there are several ways to way to get credit for these efforts: (1) using a direct approach: between the diplomatic missions in Ankara and here. I can make contact with the number one in Washington [Turkish ambassador,

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<sup>46</sup> Appendix to Paul S. Berger to Jack Kamhi re: Voting Record of Jewish Members in ‘House Consideration of H.J Res. 132’, 11 August 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP, 4–5.

Elekdağ,]. (2) someone from the American administration could drop a hint to the Turkish embassy [Washington]. (3) A newspaper article by Jewish Congressman who will discuss the issue along with a view on the difficulties to do this for obvious reasons, but the need to bring all the interests into account. (4) A word by the Congressmen to the Turkish ambassador [Elekdağ], who voted against, about how hard it was to vote against the resolution but showing understanding to the strategic argument after the explanation they have received from the Israelis.<sup>47</sup>

Eran reported about the moves in Washington keeping a professional tone, but he chose to begin his notes with a clear moral statement detaching himself from his peers in Jerusalem and Ankara. As in the previous short telegram, Eran tried to be very brief about the outcome, showing no signs of sympathy either to the Turks or to the other Israelis who pressed for these results. Certainly, Eran was troubled to feel ashamed regarding the lack of support for the Armenians. In his word choice, he tries to make the moral argument, asking his peers if it would be acceptable to treat Holocaust memory in the same way. This is a rather different approach from that taken by the pro-Turkish faction, which was driven by the understanding that ‘more’ Armenian genocide meant less ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust. Alon Liel further notes in his oral account:

located in Washington, Eran and Lamdan were close to the Congress thus closely viewing how the Jewish Congressmen experience was about all these. I, [Liel], Tamir, Milo and Lior located in Jerusalem/Ankara were viewing the Turkish aspects of the resolution and whether we could keep the positive momentum we had with Turkey; precisely, each of us experienced the events and results from his geographic location and diplomatic setting which explains the different responses to the Armenian resolution. Furthermore, each of us had his own authority, rank and responsibility which affected his commitment to blocking the Armenian resolution. So, the question of who is more moral is not relevant.<sup>48</sup>

Liel’s oral account verifies and brings together more cohesively some of the evidence gleaned from the official diplomatic records. Lamdan and Eran were far more

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<sup>47</sup> Washington to Jerusalem, re: Armenian Resolution Decision, 24 August 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP.

<sup>48</sup> Interview, Liel, 28 January 2018.

concerned about losing momentum with their other related diplomatic tasks. i.e. ensuring that Israel was recognised as a non-NATO ally of the US, was far more important than helping Ankara with Armenian resolutions. What Liel adds here helps to clarify the different points of view of that time. I should note here that all the above adds something to the argument of the thesis. Re-gaining strength as an American and NATO ally was the grand strategy. Some diplomats thought that Turkey should be an important means to this end while some others, mainly in Washington, thought that Israel could do this all alone without needing Turkey.

Turning back to Eran's telegram, Lior replied in a cynical manner that "the question 'how' or from 'whom' we can receive the credit for our contribution; that's not the question here, but if, at all, can we highlight any specific steps which we have initiated to cause the Armenian resolution to fail? Please promptly reply to this inquiry".<sup>49</sup> Eran answered tersely: "I suggest we do not give any details, so we do not have to face any kind of pressures in the future. Some of the parties involved wish to keep their anonymity".<sup>50</sup>

Eran's and Lior correspondence provides another frame to view how the Israeli diplomats in Jerusalem, Ankara, and Washington were not necessarily all 'on board' with the task of arguing against the Armenian resolution. Eran was not pleased with the moral dilemmas in the operation, but, as it appears from Lamdan's and Oron's account, the main reason for their feet dragging was different. Factions among the Israeli diplomats were troubled by the 'Turkish mission' because it did fit naturally within their own original diplomatic mission, hence, in the eyes of these diplomats in Brussels and Washington, defending Turkey was not something that could be helpful to Israel's diplomatic reputation in Western Europe or among Jewish Congressmen and Jewish originations. All in all, the above does not change the bottom line of the operation in Washington and the Israeli/Jewish mission worked out just as MFA hoped.

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<sup>49</sup> Jerusalem to Washington, re: Armenian Resolution Decision, 24 August 1987, 452, ISA/MFA/000A6AP.

<sup>50</sup> Washington to Jerusalem, re: Armenian Resolution Decision, 1 September 1987, ISA/MFA/000A6AP.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that a group of extremely pro-Turkish Israeli diplomats worked intensively behind the scenes on both sides of the Atlantic with the aim of causing the Armenian resolutions to fail as a strategy to secure a continued improvement in Israeli-Turkish relations. This chapter has demonstrated and drawn upon my argument throughout the thesis that, in the context of deterioration/normalisation of the Israeli-Turkish relations and the Cold War security dilemma, Israeli diplomats sought to leverage the contested memories of the Armenian genocide as an issue of shared concern with Turkey and the US. This sixth and final chapter has shown how leveraging the contested memories of the Armenian genocide was an outcome of the Israeli MFA grand strategy of viewing the Middle East's geospatial complexities and changing alliances. As this chapter has further shown, the Israeli diplomats in Jerusalem, Brussels/Strasbourg and Washington did not fully commit to this diplomatic strategy. In particular, Eran and Lamdan argued that seeking to undermine the Armenian resolution was immoral, although this was probably a pretext to cover their real concern that it limited their ability to move forward with their preferred diplomatic mission—which allied with Israel's grand strategy—of improving Israel's security and NATO's commitment to Israel's security as a non-member of the alliance. These factions did not change the outcome of the United States Congress resolution and the fact that Israeli-Turkish relations improved significantly during this period, was a central factor, thanks to the strong Israeli commitment to blocking the commemorative efforts of the Armenians at the United States Congress and USHMM.

Apart from these, as noted in the literature review, this chapter explores an overlooked dimension to the Western Europe-American alliance through the 1980s and in the closing years Cold War. The rifts and frictions between Cold War security concerns and human rights norms were clearly evident in this chapter as the two different Armenian resolutions have shown. The emphasis on the NATO alliance, Cold War fears, and also America's role in the Middle East was embedded in Washington. By contrast, the voices in Strasbourg underlined Turkey's treatment of minorities, human rights issues, thus the Armenian, Cyprus and Kurdish questions as needing Turkey's acknowledgment to perhaps qualify Turkey for membership of the EEC.

As in the USHMM chapter, here I have traced a similar process involving how the question of human rights was balanced with Cold War security fears: between 1978

and 1980 the Carter administration emphasised the lesson of the Holocaust as a universal one for the human rights regime, hence showing the rigour of the US commitment to the Helsinki process and the prevention of genocide, as demonstrated in the USHMM. By contrast, Reagan changed his Armenian genocide recognition rhetoric in April 1981 to non-recognition because he sought to secure Turkey's role within NATO as protecting the Middle East and NATO's southern flank. The same pattern emerges in the two resolutions explored in this chapter: the emphasis of the European Parliament was on human rights and Turkey's mistreatment of minorities, underlining how the 'new line of thinking' was not adopted by Turkey but also not by the Soviets. The fact that the US administration under Reagan was more prepared to overlook human rights concerns made the job of the Israeli diplomats easier. i.e. focusing on the common ground Jerusalem, Ankara and Washington had during the 1980s: i.e. Turkey's role in the NATO and its significance to the US. To this end, Israel in any case had far more diplomatic influence in the US than it did in the European Parliament. The US's willingness to overlook Turkey's human rights issues in the 1980s played into the hands of Israelis since Jerusalem was facing similar criticisms from the EEC in respect to treatment of the Palestinians and the occupied territories. These made it easier to focus on Turkey's strategic importance in protecting the southern flank of NATO for the US. Put together, the USHMM and this chapter serve to delineate the core argument of the thesis, with their sum being greater than their parts.

Turkey's importance to the Western alliance, specifically the fact that Turkey had the largest common border with the Soviet Union of any NATO country was overlooked in the European Parliament draft resolution among other Cold War security issues. These concerns highlighted how the Western Europeans viewed their role in shaping the future of the EEC, later to become the EU. Possibly they viewed their emerging role in the post-Cold War period as another Western superpower side-by-side with the Americans. This adds one more useful case study to think about how the Cold War ended from the Western alliance's perspective. In conclusion, the chapter has demonstrated how the Israeli diplomats viewed this friction, worked around it, thus where most of the efforts were made to block the Armenian resolution to attain the diplomatic end.

## **Conclusion: The Consequences of the ‘Armenian Genocide Decade’ in Israeli-Turkish Relations**

In this thesis, I have argued that in the context of the deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations of the late 1970s, changing alliances in the Middle East, and Cold War security dilemmas, Israeli diplomats sought to leverage the contested memories of the Armenian genocide as an issue of shared concern with Turkey and the US. This thesis makes a number of contributions to the relevant scholarly literature. Chapters five, six, seven and eight have highlighted four discrete factors underpinning the Armenian genocide campaign of the late 1970s and 1980s which showed that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each of the four chapters intimately connects to the thesis’s premise: leveraging the contested memories of the Armenian genocide for two aims: first, to normalise Israeli-Turkish relations using the 1980 DECA agreement between the US and Turkey; second, to use the 1980 military coup to underpin the US and Western bloc’s security interests in the Middle East after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

With respect to Israeli-Turkish relations, which forms the core of this thesis, much of the period covered by this thesis has until now been uncharted terrain. The investigation focused on the secondary research questions: first, what were the historical circumstances that undermined Israeli-Turkish relations in the last decade of the Cold War? Second, what role did these circumstances play in shaping Israel’s attitude toward the memory of the 1915 genocide during that period? The third chapter, focused on the period between 1978–1983, showed deterioration and then suspension of the relations. Chapter four, meanwhile, provided a close look at the gradual improvement in relations. In turn, and together with Turkey’s economic rehabilitation and Özal’s pro-Western orientation, the contested memories of the Armenian genocide gave the Israeli diplomats almost their only leverage and the main barometer of relations during this period. As the literature review has shown, many other aspects of the countries’ relations that characterised those relations in other periods, were barely featured in this period. These have affected the quality and the amount of diplomatic correspondence that the Israeli MFA has produced, and thus the period attracted very little attention from scholars. This thesis proved otherwise, in the sense that the period from the late 1970s through to the late 1980s may be referred to as ‘the Armenian genocide period’ in Israeli-Turkish relations. In the extensive scholarship on the



countries' relations too little attention seems to have been dedicated to the Armenian factor, especially during the 1980s. The timing of the campaign was ideal for the Israeli MFA: it provided a number of common interests with Turkey and the US, such as Soviet-sponsored terrorism, which could be used to help restore Israeli-Turkish relations at the same time as supporting Israel's longstanding battle against Palestinian terrorism.

The geopolitical factors above are in evidence throughout the thesis. Chapters three and four examined two consecutive periods of Israeli-Turkish relations during the last decade of the Cold War: deterioration to suspension of the relations in the first chapter, and then from suspension to normalisation in the second. Chapters three and four gave an in-depth reading of several geopolitical factors underpinning the historical baseline that was set for this thesis in the renewed East-West polarisation and contested memories of the Armenian genocide. Chapters five and six engaged with the third chapter's historical analysis. They emphasised how and why Armenian terrorism, the 1982 Holocaust and genocide conference, and the rescue operation of the Syrian and Iranian Jews together played critical roles in the Israeli diplomats' decision to employ the contested memories of the American genocide for diplomatic leverage with Turkey. Chapters seven and eight were closely engaged with the geopolitical factors of the normalisation period as introduced in chapter four. In these chapters, I focused on showing how and why reducing the scale, and even blocking the memorialisation of the Armenian genocide in Washington via the USHMM and the resolution bill in the Congress, were key to normalising the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem. Despite the relative failure with the European Parliament, the Israelis experienced success, significantly reducing the scale of the Armenian genocide commemoration activity in the capital of Israel and in the US, Turkey's most important Cold War ally.

Throughout the thesis, but mainly in chapters five to eight, we have seen how the Holocaust memory culture of the 1970s and 1980s was a secondary incentive in fuelling Israel's MFA policy on the Armenian genocide. Specifically, Turkish diplomats, mainly Gürün, were using the uniqueness argument to convince Israeli diplomats to align with the Turks, on the basis that recognising the Armenian genocide could diminish the uniqueness of the Holocaust. This argument was found to be compelling enough by most of the Israeli diplomats, who were second-generation Holocaust survivors. Together with the strong impact of the geopolitical role that the Middle East played in late Cold War rivalry, the possible threat to important Jewish

interests, such as the vulnerability of Jews in Middle Eastern countries, proved to be sufficient justification to seek to normalise relations by any means possible.

In this thesis, I also asked to what extent the attempt to link the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide as integrated history—underpinning the Western bloc's alleged commitment to the 1975 Helsinki Accords and to the 1948 UNGC—shaped Israel's policy. The answer to this question lies in the lessons learned from the Holocaust: the particular and Jewish 'never again', versus universal values of human rights protection with respect to the 1948 UNGC. Chapters six, seven and eight underlined that the alleged uniqueness of the Holocaust was a compelling alibi for Israeli diplomats and American Jewish organisations to seek to reduce the scale of the Armenian genocide and thus to ally with Turkey. Particularly in the conference of 1982, the USHMM, the European Parliament and United States Congress resolutions, there were mostly unsuccessful scholarly and commemorative attempts to link the genocidal crimes of the Ottomans and the Nazis. This link was mainly aimed at serving the diplomatic ends of those who employed it: President Carter, with his emphasis on human rights protection and prevention of genocide during his administration; subsequently President Reagan, who did this very selectively, such as in April 1981 when he tried to convey sympathy to the suffering of the Armenians, and in 1988 when Congress ratified the 1948 UNGC. Specifically, Reagan's indecision about his stance regarding human rights as a cornerstone of his foreign policy, affected his ability to implement recognition of the Armenian genocide between 1981 and 1988. Reagan's ambivalence was read by his allies (mainly Israel but also Turkey) as reflecting the prioritisation of collective security. Simultaneously, on any possible occasion, the Turkish diplomats resisted any kind of categorisation that put the Turks together with the Nazis as genocide perpetrators, and this was also the period when the need for Israel and the American Jews to protect the singularity of the Holocaust was frequently cited. More precisely, the Turks manipulated the uniqueness assertion when dealing with Israel and the American Jews when they felt too closely compared with the Nazis. ASALA attacks also played into the hands of Turkey's MFA, who argued that the 1982 conference, the USHMM and Armenian resolutions rewarded the Armenian terrorists instead of defending Turkey, a key NATO ally. Hence, it was in these key moments between 1982 and 1987 that the uniqueness assertion was powerfully employed.

As the intensification of the Armenian commemorative pressure grew from 1982 onwards, the Turkish MFA emphasised the tolerance of the Ottoman Empire

towards the Jews. Ankara also highlighted the myth of how Turkey played an instrumental role in rescuing Jews from Nazi persecution during WWII. The alleged connection between the Ottoman period and modern Turkey's treatment of Jews was an attempt to claim its historic commitment to human rights values and thus to undermine the credibility of the Armenian accusations of genocide. This 'human rights' element of Turkish foreign policy was useful to some extent when the Israeli diplomats and influential members of the Turkish and American Jewish communities came to defend the Turkish narrative of 1915 against the Armenian campaign in the US to remember that genocide in forums like the USHMM and Congress. That said, the Israeli diplomats and influential members of the Turkish and American Jewish communities were rather selective regarding the implementation of this 'human rights': i.e. lauding the support for Syrian and Iranian Jews, but overlooking the fate of the Armenians in 1915.

All the above was used as diplomatic leverage by the Israeli diplomats to encourage American influence and thus to restore Israel-Turkish relations. The Israeli grand strategy to sustain the collective security alliance in the Middle East was the end. Chapters seven and eight of the thesis have shown that it was not just the Turks that benefited from the highlighting Cold War fears and security over human rights. Both Israel and the Reagan administration made a diplomatic profit from this emphasis which is very revealing. The Western Europeans, meanwhile, put the emphasis on human rights, which explains also the acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide in 1987 at the European Parliament.

The thesis also unpacked the intensive engagement of sub-state actors. At the outset, I asked what role was played by both American Jewish organisations and the Turkish elite in the development of Israel's policy with respect to the contested memories of the Armenian genocide. As suggested in the secondary literature on American Jewish history and Holocaust consciousness in the US cultural arena, as well as the literature on the Turkish Jews, one needs to make a careful distinction between the image and the real ability of these groups to influence policies in Washington. Empirical chapters four, seven and eight have shown that the Turks wholeheartedly believed this antisemitic trope of Jews as master manipulators, using political lobbying, money, influence and connections in Washington to get their narrative of denial across whole swathes of US policy. The Israeli MFA and American Jewish organisations knew

this was not really true but were willing to ‘play along’ with the idea that they had such influence because it was the only lever of influence that they had over the Turks.

Specifically, the Turkish Jewish elite, Vassid and Kamhi, and ADL, WJC and AIPAC were each driven by their will to show the Turkish elite their loyal minority community to Turkey. In chapters three, four and five, we have seen how representatives of the WJC and ADL showed more empathy than one might expect for the delicate geopolitical order in the Middle East of the early 1980s and Israel’s vulnerable situation within it. In chapters seven and eight, we have seen how Berger’s law firm was in charge of the lobbying efforts against the Armenians. Particularly, the issue of Syrian and Iranian Jews crossing Turkey’s Eastern and Southern borders was mentioned in the correspondence between the above organisations along with the need to restore Israeli-Turkish relations as reasons for helping the Turks block the Armenian campaign. Even though the American Jews did not have any ‘formal’ foreign policy agenda, they mainly adopted the interpretation of the pro-Turkish faction in the Israeli MFA that Turkey was the biggest ally Israel could possibly have had in the unsettled geopolitical climate of the 1980s.

Above all, this thesis investigated why and how Israeli diplomats leveraged the contested memory of the Armenian genocide in the last decade of the Cold War. The synthesis of all the above cannot be complete without integrating the personal dimension, as revealed in the elite oral histories, both in relation to each other and to the official MFA records. The triumph the Israeli MFA experienced during 1986–1988 (seen mainly in chapters two, five and six), with the gradual restoration of Israeli-Turkish relations driven by blocking the Armenians in the United States Congress and the USHMM, needs to be examined in light of another overlooked factor. Chapters four and six have underlined a complicated and nuanced picture arising from the Israeli Holocaust memory culture of the 1970s and 1980s: the impulse to protect Jewish lives and interests set against the desire to uphold universal values of human rights. The diplomats charged with navigating this complex terrain were second-generation Holocaust survivors and thus represented the ‘new Jew’ who retained a personal link to the Holocaust, and the significance of this should be emphasised when analysing Israel’s concern about Jews being vulnerable again in hostile Middle Eastern countries. This is where the elite oral histories become essential, to examine why and how a group of Israeli diplomats was not enthusiastically leveraging the Armenian genocide, while

a rival and far more dominant diplomatic group sought to use the Armenian factor to restore relations with Turkey.

To this end, in chapters three and eight, the oral accounts highlight the inter-relationships between a number of competing groups of diplomats that cannot be gleaned so clearly from MFA official records alone. These groups could be defined as MFA officials in Jerusalem and Ankara and Israeli diplomats who served overseas, such as those in Brussels and Washington; and as those working for the MFA and the Israeli intelligence agencies, especially the IISO. While the latter relationship should be examined in a separate study, it is still evident from the snapshot provided in chapters one, two, three and, especially, in chapter four, how the Israeli diplomatic setting was driven by Israeli agencies competing for diplomatic influence.

Beyond the analysis of these important relationships, the different readings of the importance of the Armenian factor vis à vis the Israeli impulse to protect Jewish interests and the wellbeing of Israel as the Jewish state played a great role in the gradual restoration of Israeli-Turkish relations. In this line of analysis, as chapters four, seven and eight have shown, by 1985 two main groups in the Israeli MFA were critical to understanding what drove the relative success of the normalisation period: the Israeli the pro-Turkish faction (Liel, Lior, Milo et al.) compared to the Israeli diplomats in Washington and Brussels (Oron, Eran et al.). This adds depth to the central argument of the thesis. The pro-Turkish faction demonstrated that even though they have shaped the Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide, professional diplomatic ambitions and personal prestige are indeed a valuable component in a full understanding of the diplomatic picture.

With respect to the conceptual framework of the diplomacy of genocide, especially the question of whether memory could be mobilised by diplomats, chapters five, six, seven and eight have argued how, in key moments, diplomats used their transnational connections to mobilise memory, i.e. to empower the perpetrators' denial narrative. In that eventuality, if Israel's MFA, especially 'the pro-Turkish faction', had taken the initiative to support the Armenian narrative from 1980 onwards then we would have likely witnessed different results in terms of the establishment of positive momentum towards the memorialisation of the Armenian genocide in international forums. The Turks, in such a scenario, would have had fewer opportunities to defend their narrative, and would have received less support in doing so. Beyond any doubt, with the Israeli MFA on their side, the Armenians would have created a much more

sympathetic environment to include the 1915 genocide in the 1982 conference, the USHMM and the resolution in the US Congress. As chapters, five to eight showed, reinforcing the Turkish denial narrative was an excellent return of investment in terms of normalising Israeli-Turkish relations. But, if the Israeli diplomats would have chosen supporting the Armenians, they had to consider the downsides for Israel and Jews of this approach: certain severing of diplomatic relations with Turkey, probable closure of the escape route for the Iranian Jews, possible persecution of Jews within Turkey, and also a much stronger anti-Jewish Muslim alliance in the Middle East.

The success both Ankara and Jerusalem experienced during the ‘decade of the Armenian genocide’ with regards to marginalising the ‘Armenian question’, therefore, had an immense impact over the course of the post-Cold War period. Specifically, the gradual improvement in Israeli-Turkish relations surveyed in chapter four led to the ‘golden years’ of the 1990s and early 2000s, albeit far beyond the scope of this thesis. The Israeli manoeuvring in key moments of the ‘decade of the Armenian genocide’ crystallised, and then rooted, the Israeli policy on the Armenian genocide for decades to come because they created a norm and high expectations which the Israeli MFA had to fulfil. The ‘geopolitics of genocide’ of the 1980s and 1990s in the Israeli Turkish relations unfolded into the period of the 2000s. Although the persistent poor relations with Turkey since 2004 have shown the limits of this accommodation, what revalidates the argument of the thesis is that a new regional player, Azerbaijan, with a similar anti-Armenian agenda to Turkey, become an important ally of Israel. Similar to the geopolitics of the early 1980s, the Baku-Jerusalem alliance since the early 2000s has been based on intelligence cooperation, arms trades and providing Israel important accesses to the Persian Gulf including to the border with Iran. This makes the significance 'geopolitics of genocide' in the Middle East relevant then as now.

# Appendix 1

## Oral Interview Consent Form

**Eldad Ben-Aharon, Ph.D.**

**Candidate**

Holocaust Research Institute, Royal

Holloway, University of London



My name is Eldad Ben-Aharon and I am a Ph.D. Candidate conducting doctoral research focusing on Israel's Foreign Policy during the last decade of the Cold War. The project also addresses the triangular relationship between Israel, Turkey and the US during the 1970s and 1980s with respect to the Armenian genocide. The project is supervised by Professor Dan Stone, the Director of Holocaust Research Institute, Royal Holloway, University of London.

In this research I am studying a wide range of primary sources, including historiography, archival documents from the Israeli State Archive (ISA), and oral interviews with former Israeli diplomats.

At present, the interviewer holds the copyright of any oral history interview as its creator. Since I am recording your story, however, I am happy to share copyright with you. If you wish to share copyright I ask that you sign a release form granting your permission for me to use this material.

It is important to note that the interviews are conducted voluntarily and that you, as the interviewee, have the right to cease participation in the research at any time, with no sanctions. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that the interviews conducted in this study will be used for research purposes only and will be retained exclusively by me. If you are interested, I can send you a summary of my research when it is finished. As well as my doctoral thesis, I intend to:

- Write articles for publication with quotes from the interviews
- Create a visual object/artefact archive with quotes from the interviews
- Use interview material in presentations at conferences

Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further clarification, by phone +31 (0) 628265565 or email:

If you feel that the study can harm you for any reason, you are also welcome to contact the Authority for Post Graduate Research Office at the Royal Holloway, University of London, phone: +44 (0) 1784 443311.

Thank you for the willingness and cooperation!

Eldad Ben-Aharon

I agree to the above

Name:

Signature:

Date:



## **Appendix 2**

### **Who's Who:**

1. Alon Liel – the Israeli Charge D'affaires in Turkey (1981–1983).
2. Avi Primor – Israel's ambassador to the EEC (1987–1993).
3. Binyamin Oron – Israel's second secretary to the EEC (1985–1989).
4. Bulnet Aliriza– Former Turkish diplomat who served in New York and Washington. (1980s).
5. Carmi Gillon – Director of IGSS (1995–1996) and Israel's ambassador to Denmark (2001–2003).
6. Daniel Mokady – Israel's ambassador to Chile (1989–1993) and MFA director of Policy Research Institute.
7. David Sultan – Israeli ambassador in Ankara (2001–2003).
8. Dr. Yaakov Cohen – MFA Deputy Director General (1988-1992)
9. Efrim Halevy – Ninth director of the IISO (1998–2002), and Israeli ambassador to the European Union (1996–1998).
10. Eli Shaked – Former Israeli consul in Ankara and later in Istanbul (1980–1984).
11. Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir – Former senior officer in the IISO and during the Iranian revolution the former IISO station chief in Tehran (1978–1979).
12. Gabi Levy – Israeli ambassador in Ankara (2007–2011).
13. Gideon Ben Ami – Israel's former ambassador in Sweden (1994–1999).
14. Hanan Bar-On – Deputy General Manager of the Israeli MFA (1979–1987).
15. Itamar Rabinovich – Israel's ambassador to the United States (1993–1996).
16. Kenneth Bialkin – Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations (1980s).
17. Meir Dagan – Tenth Director of the IISO (2002–2011).
18. Moshe Sasson – Israeli special ambassador to Turkey (1978–1980).
19. Nachik Navoth – Former senior IISO official (1955–1985) and Deputy Director (1982–1985).
20. Neville Lamdan – Israeli diplomat and an MFA special official to the US Congress (1984–1989).
21. Oğuz Çelikkol – Turkey's ambassador to Tel Aviv, (2009–2010).

22. Paul Berger – Retired partner at the Arnold & Porter law firm, American Jewish lawyer and a lobbyist during the 1980s. A key individual in lobbying against the 1987 Armenian resolution.
23. Reuven Merhav – Former senior IISO official (1961–1983), IISO station chief in Tehran (1977-1978), the MFA general director (1988–1991).
24. Richard Norman Perle – US government official responsible for NATO and deputy chairmen of Defence Policy Board Advisory Committee (1981–1987).
25. Yehoyada Haim – Israel’s ambassador to China (1995–2000) and to India (2002–2007), and during the 1980s the head of the MFA’s Middle East department.
26. Yitzhak Lior – General director of the MFA Middle East Department, (1983–1987) and Israel’s ambassador in Japan, (2000-2004).
27. Yossi Alpher – Former Menior IISO official (1971–1988).

### Appendix 3

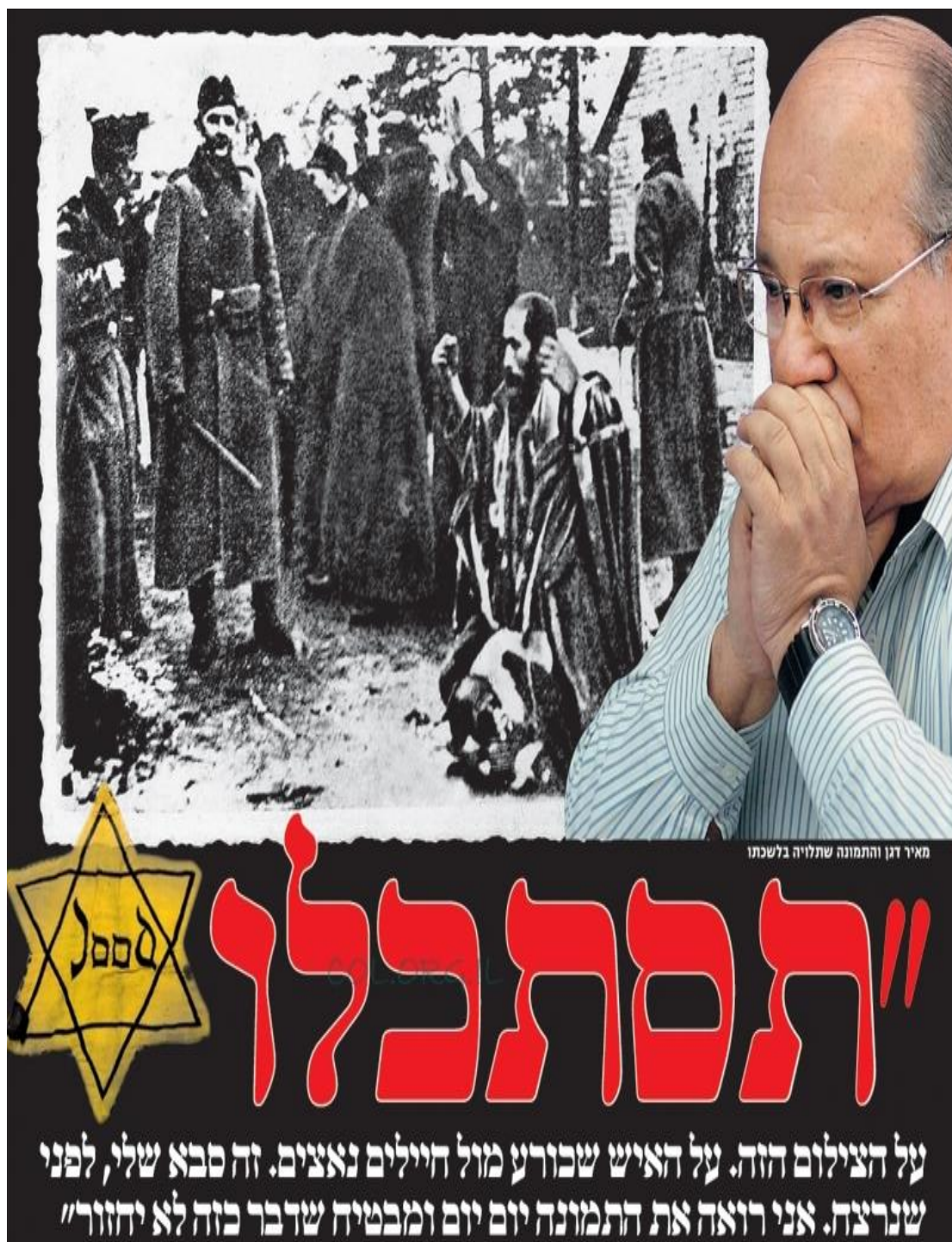
Ber Erlich Slosny, 1942, the Jews of ghetto Łuków, Poland, fall 1942. The photo was cited also in Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London: Penguin Group, 1993), 40.





## Appendix 4

Meir Dagan, tenth director of the IISO (2002–2011), publicly revealed this personal Holocaust memory in his speech at a Tel Aviv rally, 7 March 2015.



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David Sultan, 20 November 2016, Jerusalem, Israel

Efraim Halevy, 8 June, 2016, Tel Aviv, and 7 January 2017 Ramat Aviv, Israel.

Oğuz Çelikkol, 21 July 2017, Istanbul, Turkey.

Reuven Merhav, 23 July 2017, Jerusalem, Israel.

Alon Liel, 3 September, 2015, and 24 July 2017, Mevaseret Zion, Israel.

Eli Sheked, 25 July 2017, Modi'in, Israel.

Eliezer (Geizi) Tzafrir, 26 July 2017, Ramat Hashron. Israel.

Yehoyada Haim, 28 January 2018, Jerusalem, Israel.

Benyamin Oron, 29 January 2018, Jerusalem, Israel.

Neville Lamdan, 29 January 2018, Mevaseret Zion. Israel.

Itamar Rabinovich, 2 February 2018, Tel Aviv, Israel.

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