

**THE RESTORATION ON FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN  
TURKEY AND ISRAEL ON JUNE 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

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**ABSTRACT**

The incident of Mavi Marmara in 2010 became the other history of the downing on diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel. The conflict emerged when Turkish volunteers who brought humanitarian aids did not accept the screening from Israeli troop toward their ships. On the other side, Israeli commandos did not tolerate any ships which tried to pass the blockade in Gaza must be screened. This situation increased the tension and both parties fought. Israeli troops who were completed with gunfire killed 10 volunteers. This incident made Erdogan angry and withdrew his ambassador in Tel-Aviv.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the conflict resolution to solve the problem. After the conflict held on for 6 years, Turkey and Israel finally restored

their bilateral relations in 2016. The method of this research uses qualitative research which obliges the writer to collect the data from book, article, journal, e-news, and other resource.

This research can prove the reasons of Turkey – Israel agreement to restore their relations. Turkish domestic and international norms became the main reasons for their restoration in 2016. These reasons could not be avoided by Erdogan to decide his policy to restore with Israel.

*Keywords:*

*Mavi Marmara incident, diplomatic relations, conflict resolutions, domestic norm, international norm, humanitarian assistance*

## **Introduction**

Turkish recognition on the independence of Israel can be considered as the bridge to connect the relations between Turkey and Israel since the recognition on Israel is about sovereignty of a state. This phenomenon took place a year after Israel's declaration on its independence in 1948. Turkey is included as one of states which admitted Israel as a sovereign state in the early of its independence. This recognition became a historical moment because it made Islamic world questioning Turkey's foreign policy at that time. Israel's expansion to drive out some of Palestinian citizens to gain wider land became the main issue why Islamic world questioned toward Turkey's recognition in 1949. Moreover, Turkey is well known as a muslim nation due to the historical background of Turkey – Ustmani. Furthermore, Turkish population is muslim majority (Kosebalaban, 2010).

At first, Turkey – Israel bilateral relations was not about their ambassadors' exchange, but their relations was about their foreign affair ministers' exchange (Israeli, 2001). In the common diplomatic relations, structurally, an ambassador is actually under the minister of foreign affair even though he is also the right-hand of a President who is responsible to report the information, protecting the citizens who live abroad, state's representation, initiating resolutions, and increasing the relations between host and home state (Widagdo & Widhiyanti, 2008). This common function was not used in the beginning of Turkey – Israel relations at that time as ministers of foreign affair of both states had to bring two big responsibilities as ministers and ambassadors.

Since Turkey and Israel conducted relations, the fluctuations of their relations took place many times. Recently, the incident of Mavi Marmara in 2010 impacted on the relations between Turkey and Israel. It seemed like breaking the trust in every single agreement built by both states. Ankara could not tolerate this accident then withdrawing their ambassador. In the diplomatic communication, calling the ambassador can be considered as breaking the diplomatic ties between the two states. Both Turkey and Israel had their justification responding the accident of Mavi Marmara in 2010. In the Israeli side, the groups which handle this program, IHH and its allies are dangerous groups since they have network with terrorist group. For Turkey, the blockade is the real terrorism action. As Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan strongly inveighed toward Israeli commandos' action (The New York Times, 2010).

Mavi Marmara is actually the name of Turkish ship for Gaza humanitarian aids. In 2010, the ships brought many kinds of humanitarian aids for Palestinians such as medicine for first aid, food, and clothes. This accident then was well known as Mavi Marmara incident due to the conflict between Israeli military and Turkish volunteers happened in this ship. This incident was caused by the misunderstanding of both states to overcome this issue. Israel provided a place for Turkish ship to be screened and transferred to Gaza. This is the procedure made by Israel for every single aid given to Gaza. On the other side, Turkish volunteers rejected this procedure regarding their claim on their humanitarian aid which could be categorized as the protected and freedom ship to be transferred to Gaza (Sekulow, Turkey - Israel Relations). Unfortunately, Israeli military could not

tolerate this action, and they suddenly attacked the ship. There were ten of Turkish citizens who became the victims of this tragedy. A week after this incident, exactly on June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Turkey announced to stop the agreements which were created by both states. There was an attempt to have meeting between both states' foreign ministers to solve this problem. There was no significant result of that meeting, because Israel did not want to apologize to the victims which became the main requirement to solve it (Archy World News, 2016).

In the unstable relations starting the incident of Mavi Marmara in 2010, diplomatically, Turkey downgraded their diplomatic ties with Israel by calling their ambassador from Tel-Aviv on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 (Turkey appoints ambassador to Israel, 2016). Their lowest level of relations really took place for around 2 years only because both states actually began to rebuild their relations starting in 2013 where Netanyahu agreed to apology. The apology done by Netanyahu signed the open dialogue from both states' elites. This apology could make those conflicting states restore soon (Sherwood & MacAskill, 2013). It was proven 3 years after the apology. The restoration of full diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel was finally announced by both head of states and government on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016, followed by some of agreements. Six-year hope of full diplomatic restoration was finally reached in Rome. These situations sign that both states need each other, and it is an urgent need.

The restoration between Turkey and Israel was not taken for granted. There were a lot of factors which were contributed to reach the normalizations. Besides fulfilling the Turkish requirements for Israel, Turkish domestic security situation

and international security situation were involved to gain the agreement as well. The internal and external security of Turkey became their main reason to conduct the restoration with Israel. Since 2010, Turkish domestic security was in threats. The bombing which took place in Turkey was one of examples which injured Turkish domestic security. Besides the domestic instability condition, the international security situation also influenced the restoration. Turkish international security was also facing dilemmatic situation in 2015. Russia as one of Turkish best partners gave sanction to Turkey after the case of downing on Russian warplane (World leaders react to Turkey's downing of Russian jet, 2015). Turkey – Russian relations was getting down when Turkish army shot Russian warplane which aimed to help Syrian government to fight against rebellions' group. That phenomenon made Turkish perception about the restoration with Israel became their priority to stabilize the situations.

Even though both states, Turkey and Israel, finally agreed to restore their full diplomatic relations in the middle of 2016, in the case of Turkey and Israel restoration there are still some groups which showed their unsatisfied action by protesting toward this agreement. The majority groups which rejected this normalization are caused by their dissatisfaction of their government final result. The groups are not only a domestic group which is derived from Turkey but also the international group which protests for it.

One of the domestic groups which protests toward this agreement is İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı (İHH). This group struggles for justice which should be gotten for the victims of Mavi Marmara accident. The President

of IHH, Bülent Yıldırım supports the court to run the execution for the justice although the restoration between Turkey and Israel are reached. He added that the blood of Mavi Marmara victims could not be changed by paying the compensation. Money cannot replace the volunteers' death. Therefore, IHH will always reject the agreement before the justice has not been achieved (İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı, 2016).

The other rejection of the agreement on restoration of full diplomatic relation between Turkey and Israel also comes from the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC). This group or organization represents international group which does not support on the agreement. Beside this organization, one of the biggest organizations in Palestine, Hamas is also the organization which also rejects Turkey – Israel restoration since Hamas' leaders claimed that they were not involved in the negotiation. This refusal makes Turkey in the dilemmatic situation. On one side, Turkey has tight relations with those groups which reject the normalization. On the other side, the restoration is needed to maintain Turkish stability, especially in term of their security (The Electronoc Intifada, 2016).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the reasons why Turkey agreed to normalize its relations with Israel on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016. To answer the question, the writer uses the concept of normalization and the theory of constructivism.

### **Normalization**

Ted Piccone wrote an article under the title United States-Cuba Normalizations: Strategic Implications for U.S. National Security define that

“normalization process, which is designed, after all, to employ dialogue and negotiation to prevent and manage such problem” (2015, p. 10).

The opening dialogue can be the way of conflicting states which breakdown the diplomatic ties to normalize their relations. In a such situation, the talk between the conflicting states is important to reach the normalization in order to solve the problem soon. Normalization aims to create a trouble situation into a normal situation where communication between the states can be maintained as usual. The elite of governmental leaders can initiate the dialogue since they are the representative of state to run the government and have authority to do so.

### **Constructivism**

For Alexander Wendt, students of international relations must understand that constructivism has two basic principles; those are:

That the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature (Wendt, 1999).

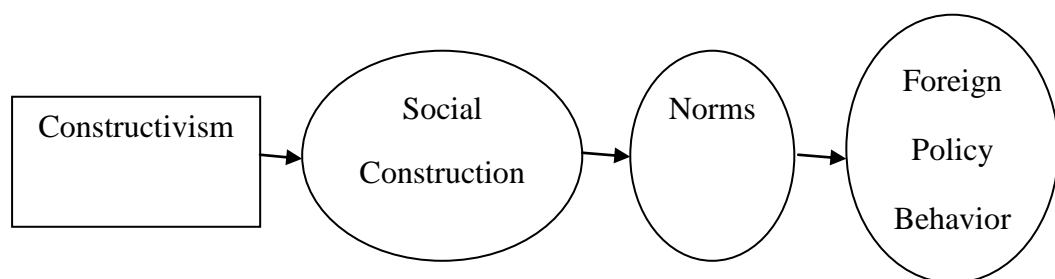


Figure 1.1 – The Relations between Norm and Actor’s Behavior

Source: *Wendt, Alexander. 1999. Social Theory of International Politics.*

*Cambridge University Press*



It can be seen in figure 1 that constructivism is shaped by the social construction. How society can make perception is influenced by the interaction among people who share their idea. This shared knowledge created norms which initiates interest and identity to be constructed. Norms is a supra-structure which builds the foreign policy behavior of a state. For Wendt, norms are defined as shared of belief which may or may not be built behavior depending on their strength. Norms can influence the behavior of a state if it is constructed (Wendt, 1999).

In the internal of constructivism, there are some kinds of constructivism theory such as systemic constructivism, unit – level constructivism, and holistic constructivism. These branches of constructivism have their focus of analysis. The function is to ease a researcher to divide a phenomenon using one of the constructivism branches to analysis. Related to the discussion, these are the variants of constructivism:

### **1. Systemic Constructivism**

Systemic Constructivism is a part of Constructivism theory which agrees on neo-realism perspective. This perspective believes on ‘third-image’ perspective, or their concern is in the interaction among states actor of international system. This theory does not concern in the domestic political system. Besides focusing on the international political realm, this kind of constructivism argues that state’s social identity is constructed by international normative and ideational factor. The example of systemic constructivism is well shared by Alexander Wendt through

his thoughts about two kinds of identity which are social identity and corporate identity of state. Social identity characterizes status, role or personality that international society ascribes to a state (Burchill, et al., 2005). Meanwhile, corporate identity assumes that the internal human, material, ideological, or cultural factors construct a state as what it is.

## 2. Unit – Level Constructivism

The perspective of Unit – Level constructivism is the opposite of systemic constructivism theory. This theory focuses on the domestic norms, identity, and interest rather than concentrating on the international factors. The possibility of internal interaction to influence the domestic identity and interest can build the behavior of state, especially building on domestic political realm (Burchill, et al., 2005).

## 3. Holistic Constructivism

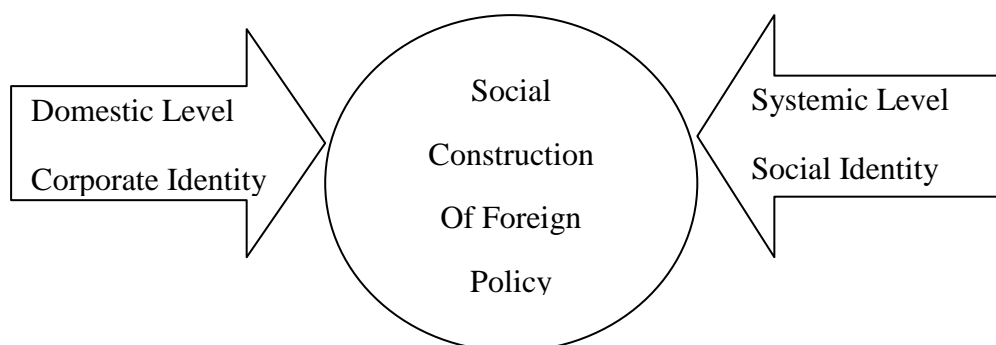


Figure 1.2 – The Relations between Domestic and Systemic Level

Source: *Nia, Mahdi Mohammad. 2011. A Holistic Constructivist Approach to Iran Foreign Policy. International Journal of Business and Social Science*

Last but not least, the variant of constructivism theory, Holistic Constructivism bonds between Systemic and Unit – Level constructivism. This perspective mobilizes identities and interests of states to handle the domestic and international as two parts of social and politics into one structure. The focus of Holistic Constructivism is on the accommodation toward domestic and international phenomenon to construct states' behavior to respond international system. Analyzing from the perspective on this kind of constructivism, the decision of foreign policy is influenced by the interaction between domestic and international social environment (Nia, 2011).

Through the clear explanation above about constructivism, this theory is a proper one to be used to analyze the case of Turkey – Israel restoration. The concepts of norms, ideas, and identity are the tools to characterize the supra-structure of Turkey which agreed to normalize. The variants of constructivism such as Systemic Constructivism, Unit – Level Constructivism and especially Holistic Constructivism help so much in understanding the focus of Turkish behavior which influences their foreign policy.

#### **THE REASONS OF TURKEY – ISRAEL NORMALIZATION ON FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN JUNE 27<sup>TH</sup>, 2016**

Considering the explanation above, constructivism theory can be implemented in analyzing the case study of Turkey – Israel normalization on their full diplomatic relations. Constructivism is a relevant theory to explain this phenomenon due to Turkey and Israel restoration is also caused mainly by

domestic and international norms. Therefore, the writer would like to explain about the correlation between the norms and the factors of the restoration. Furthermore, unstable condition of Turkish domestic and international security significantly played a big role to reach the normalization.

## **A. TURKISH DOMESTIC NORM**

### **1. The Pressure of Turkish Military**

The accident of Mavi Marmara cut off the whole agreement between Turkey and Israel relations including military equipment in which both states had been cooperating since 1994. Before the flotilla accident in 2010, The cooperation between Turkey and Israel in term their defense cooperation was in many aspects such as air, sea, land (both infantry and armor), intelligence, and the manufacturing of aircraft, armaments, and missiles. Their military cooperation brought many benefits for Turkish military realm such as military training, military industry, and sharing of Israeli intelligence. The battle between Turkey and Kurdistan worker party was the example in which Israeli intelligence supported Turkey in 2000s. Before the disaster ruined Turkish – Israel military relations in 2010, Turkey and Israel had project in term of their defense industry.

The benefits that Turkey got in the defense industrial cooperation with Israel were declined rapidly due to the impact of discontinuance on diplomatic relations between both states. Military cooperation which was built for long time ago became the victim of flotilla incident as well. Joint military exercises between both states were stopped (Sezer, 2016). There were a lot of military trainings

which increased Turkish military capability, especially in term of air-force. Military industrial cooperation was dismissed. This action made Turkish military equipment was left behind others. Israel is well known as the producer of sophisticated military equipment which makes Turkey depends on it. Besides military equipment, the ceasing of defense industrial relations affected the decreasing on Turkish national fund for military. This situation was effected the unstable condition of internal Turkish military.

In fact, Turkish military somehow needs Israeli military support. The explanation above shows how big Turkish military dependence on Israeli military is. Therefore, it cannot be denied that Turkish military elites force Erdogan to restore the diplomatic ties with Israel in order to stabilize Turkish military (Gurcan, 2016). This situation actually makes Erdogan dilemma. In one hand, Erdogan has strong relations with groups which reject Turkey – Israel restoration such as IHH and Hamas. On the other hand, the restoration with Israel must be taken to calm down Turkish military stabilization. Even if it is a difficult choice for Erdogan due to hurting his partners, this decision is the right one.

## **2. The Experience of Israeli Military in Combating Terrorism**

Terrorism attacks still become the real threats for Turkey. The bombing which often takes place in Turkish important cities such as Ankara and Istanbul make Turkish people and visitors worried. This situation urges Turkish military to always be ready in anytime terrorists attack. The readiness of Turkish military in many aspects is needed because terrorism threatens state's sovereignty. Turkish

military must be able to renew annually their military equipment. Sophisticated military equipment is needed to militate the terrorist groups. The discontinuance of Turkey – Israel relations brings a new hope for the terrorist group since the military support from Israeli military sophisticated equipment decreased. This situation can be utilized by Turkish enemies such as The Partiya Karkeren Kurdish or The Kurdistan Worker's party (PKK) and Kurdistan Freedom Falcons or Teyrenbazen Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK) to create scarcity in Turkey. These two groups are derived from Kurds ethnic which are dissatisfied with Turkish de facto and de jure government.

Since the downing of Turkey – Israel relations in 2010, the threat of terrorism increased rapidly in Turkey. During last five years, the most significant terrorism attacks took place in 2015. This data is strengthened by The U.S. State Department's 2015 Country Reports on Terrorism. In June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, U.S. Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism Justin Siberell announced that the world terrorism attacks decreased 13% in 2015 compared by 2014. Unfortunately, this situation was not obtained in Turkey as Turkish terrorism threats were increased (Terror attacks increased in Turkey in 2015: US Report, 2016).

Through the phenomenon of terrorist attacks above, Turkish military needs to cooperate with Israeli military which has great experience in solving the problems with terrorism groups such as Hezbollah from Lebanon and Hamas from Palestine. These interest groups are actually counted as important groups in their states. Hezbollah has its significant role in Lebanon political field, so does Hamas in Palestine. The different view people see these groups makes different

perception. In the Israeli point of view, these two groups are considered as terrorist groups which can attack Israel anytime.

The experience of Israel in facing terrorist groups can be taken as a new knowledge for Turkish military. Turkey has not finished with its domestic problem, terrorist threats which often take place in the core of Turkey. In having joint military cooperation with Israel, this experience is really needed for Turkish military. This cooperation can increase Turkish military in overcoming its problem with Terrorist groups such as PKK and TAK.

## **A. TURKISH INTERNATIONAL NORM**

### **1. Pressure of International Norm**

The international norm of Turkey cannot be separated from Turkey – U.S. agreement. The agreement on mutual security between both states in 1957 and followed by Turkish decision in joining NATO were the main reasons on the strength of Turkey – US relations. By looking at the historical background on Turkey – U.S relations, it is impossible for Erdogan to desert from U.S intention. The dependence of Turkish military equipment to U.S is the important reason behind Turkish tight relations with U.S. In 1990s, Turkish military equipment was derived and modernized by U.S supply (Çakir, 2009). Without U.S military transfer, Turkish military would not ever have modern military power. The recent Turkey – Israel military cooperation was stronger since the signing on Turkish welcoming US military and its ally to use Turkish military base to attack ISIS coalition in 2015 (Affairs, 2016).

This agreement which cannot be lifted by Erdogan makes U.S easily controls the mind and action of Turkey. This international norm urges Erdogan to have normalization with Israel. As the President of Turkey which is left of Turkey – U.S tight relations, Erdogan must be ready with the Jews partner label. This is not caused by his support toward Jews state, but U.S relations. The more Erdogan tries to leave the normalization, the more U.S government forces him to restore with Israel. If he strongly opposes U.S policy, Turkey must be ready to counter international threats.

The binding agreement between Turkey and U.S rules Turkey in deciding decision making. This situation makes Turkey obey toward U.S. In the restoration case between Turkey and Israel, Turkey was forced by U.S government to normalize its relations. It is like simply said that the security of Turkey from international threats is on U.S umbrella. When Turkey cannot be controlled by U.S, their security is in threats. It is caused by Turkish sophisticated military equipment is derived from U.S. Furthermore, U.S

U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry's visitation in 2013 to Istanbul before arriving to Israel was the open dialogue which was tried to restore Turkey – Israel relations (Gordon & Kershner, Kerry Asks Turkey to Act on Relations With Israel, 2013). U.S involvement showed its significant result when Obama called Erdogan in February 2014. In this occasion, Obama and Erdogan discussed about Turkish relations with Israel deeply. In April 2014, Erdogan commented to Charlie Rose which indicated Turkey – Israel normalization. Obama approach toward Erdogan signed the only President of U.S who can influence Erdogan



(Arbell, The U.S. - Turkey - Israel Triangle, 2014). The dialogue between Obama and Erdogan strengthen U.S position which has strong control toward Turkey. The dependence of Turkish military toward U.S can be benefitted to control Turkey. The explanation above is rational enough to explain Erdogan decisions to restore Turkey – Israel diplomatic relations.

## **2. Turkish Military Concession for U.S. Military**

The Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA) 1980 which was agreed by Turkey and U.S signed their strong bilateral relations, especially in term of security. In this agreement, U.S. military welcomes to access to have joint military exercise or use Turkish military facilities. For Turkey, this agreement is needed due to Turkish military industrial interest. Recently, U.S is one of weaponry producer states. Most of sophisticated weaponry systems are derived from U.S. This occasion can be utilized by Turkish military in providing Turkish military assistance. The other point of the agreement is discussing about war against terrorist attacks and strengthening bilateral economy or trade relations (Central Accounting Office of United States, 1982)

The agreement above makes Turkey difficult to go away from U.S shade. Furthermore, the significant role of U.S in preventing Turkey from international threats makes Turkey depends on it. Turkey is curbed by U.S. interest in Middle-East. It seems like Turkey has to serve U.S. interest. The strategic position of Turkey which is between two important continents, Europe and Asia, can be utilized well by U.S. to fulfill its interest. There are some U.S. military bases in

Turkey which aims to strengthen its position in Middle-East. Sometimes, U.S. uses Turkish military air base to attack its enemy by its airstrike.

It could be seen when U.S tried to attack Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in 2015. The Foreign Minister of Turkey, Mevlut Cavusoglu states as Turkish representative that Turkey welcomes U.S in using Incirlik Air Base to attack ISIS. The endorsement from Turkish government gave a new hope for U.S. Actually, the facilitation that Turkish government gave to U.S in the 1980 agreement was all Turkish military facilitation for NATO's needs. The U.S army can use the facilitation considering Turkish authority approval. U.S has prepared its Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to ruin ISIS civilization in Middle-East. This was a serious step that U.S took in combating the terrorist group in 2015. One of U.S interest which can be seen from its foreign policy is combating against terrorist groups which can show off its power (Gurcan, 2015).

This phenomenon clearly shows us that Turkish dependency on U.S. security cannot be relinquished at this moment. The root was not caused by Erdogan's administration, but his former administration. The agreement between Turkey and U.S has been rooted which is difficult to be changed. Turkish military and U.S military has close relations which also becomes the reason why Erdogan needs to always cooperate with U.S. government. Erdogan's decision toward U.S will affect his power in Turkish domestic politics. The concessions which Erdogan provides to U.S sign Erdogan's willing to maintain his power. This situation also shows us that Turkey is still controlled by U.S. government.

## **Conclusion**

This research clearly shows that the behavior of state is affected by the norms of the state itself. The way of a state makes the decision for its foreign policy and a state implements its foreign policy is derived from the norms of the state. The norms can be from domestic or international norms. It also cannot be denied that state can be influenced by the combination between domestic and international norms. In affecting the state behavior, the stronger norms will have stronger influence toward the state behavior.

The case study of Turkey – Israel normalization can be contributed in the class of conflict resolution. This case can explain the reason why conflicting parties must restore their relations ties. Through the real case study, student hopefully can understand the material easily. Besides the class of International relations in Middle-east and conflict resolution, introduction of diplomacy class can also uses this research to explain about the real phenomenon of diplomacy between two conflicting parties.

The writer of this research has tried hard to analyze this research. The necessary data is used to strengthen the analysis of the phenomenon. The writer also tries to look for the factors in detail why Turkey agrees to restore its diplomatic relations with Israel. Even if Turkish domestic and international norms can prove the reason of the agreement, the other question toward this phenomenon emerges about how long the influence of norms can maintain this restoration since Erdogan habitually changes Turkish domestic constitution.