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The Rise and Fall of Turkey's Decoupling Strategy with Israel

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Abstract

Turkish-Israeli relations have been marked by a paradox for the past sixteen years: while diplomatic relations occasionally erupted into crisis, bilateral trade volume expanded consistently, reaching record highs in 2023. Most current literature explains this trajectory by analyzing either the evolution of Turkish state identity (Constructivist frameworks) or regional security dynamics (Realist frameworks). This article argues that while both approaches offer valuable insights, neither fully accounts for the simultaneous resilience of trade ties and the volatility of diplomatic relations. Through the lens of the Neoclassical Realist framework, this article argues that Turkish foreign policy operated as a bifurcated strategy of “decoupling.” For two decades, systemic imperatives, primarily economic reliance on diversified export markets, sustained resilient trade relations, while domestic constraints such as regime legitimacy and electoral concerns necessitated hostile rhetoric. Analyzing the trajectory from the “One Minute” crisis in 2009 to the trade ban in 2024, the article demonstrates that this equilibrium relied on insulating the economic track from the political sphere. The eventual rupture in 2024 suggests

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that when domestic political costs exceed systemic economic benefits, the decoupling mechanism collapses, forcing a realignment of material policy with identity-based discourse.

Keywords

Turkish-Israeli relations, neoclassical realism, decoupling, political economy, AKP

Introduction

For over two decades, the relationship between Turkey and Israel reflected a paradox: the inverse correlation between diplomatic hostility and economic cooperation. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed power in 2002, political relations between the two countries frequently deteriorated into crises, resulting in the recalling of ambassadors, harsh rhetorical exchanges, and the suspension of military cooperation. Interestingly, the political turmoil between the two countries rarely impeded the flow of capital until 2024. Between 2002 and 2022, bilateral trade volume expanded from 1.4 billion dollars to nearly 9 billion dollars.¹ This phenomenon suggests a strategic compartmentalization, a “decoupling strategy” of foreign policy where the trade benefits are insulated and defended from political shocks between the two countries.

However, this long-standing equilibrium collapsed in 2024 with the Turkish suspension of all export and import activities with Israel. The rupture poses a theoretical challenge. If the primary driver of Turkish foreign policy is identity and image as the Constructivist scholars argue, the trade relations should have been broken off a long time ago; at least certainly with the start of the Gaza War in October 2023. Conversely, if the primary driver is material interest as some Realist scholars suggest, the economic relationship should have persisted despite the war just as it did in the aftermath of the 2009 “One Minute” crisis and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident. Instead, Turkey maintained the “decoupling” strategy for seven months of brutal war until it abandoned it in spring 2024. Therefore, this article investigates the primary driving factors of Turkish foreign policy toward Israel with regard to the resilience of the decoupling strategy and what factors precipitated its collapse in 2024.

The literature on this subject is largely divided into two different approaches. On one side, the “Identity School” researchers emphasizing identity² trace the trajectory of Turkish-Israeli rela-

1. *Foreign Trade Statistics, December 2023* [Dış Ticaret İstatistikleri, Aralık 2023], Version 49630. Turkish Statistical Institute 2024, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Dis-Ticaret-Istatistikleri-Aralik-2023-49630>, (access 12.11.2025).

2. A. Erdoğan Şafak, *Turkey and Israel: Evolution of State Identity and Shifting Relations*, “Israel Affairs”, 2024, Vol. 30, Issue 1, pp. 105–124, DOI: 10.1080/13537121.2024.2295616; D.F. Ünal, *Turkey's Relations with Israel in the 2000s: A Constructivist Perspective*, Ph.D. Thesis, Middle East Technical University (Turkey) 2016; L. Hintz, *Fighting for Us, Inside and Out: National Identity Contestation and Foreign Policy in Turkey*, Ph.D. Thesis, The George Washington University 2015; T.E. Oztürk, *Religion as a Factor in Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Constructivist Overlook*, “Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations”, 2014, Vol. 13, No. 1&2, pp. 62–74.

tions to the evolution of Turkish state identity. These accounts demonstrate the shift from a Kemalist-Western orientation to a conservative-Islamic one that necessitated championing the Palestinian cause. While this explains the evolution of Turkish rhetoric regarding Israel and the evolution of state identity in Turkey, it has difficulty accounting for the material signal; if identity was the chief driver of policy, trade statistics should have mirrored the diplomatic collapse. Specifically, these identity-based approaches fail to explain the period between October 2023 and April 2024 during which the Turkish government continued to supply strategic materials such as steel and cement to Israel despite harsh rhetorical condemnation by the Turkish elites.

On the other side, researchers point to a “strategic autonomy” approach³ and argue that Turkey is acting with more freedom in a chaotic neighborhood and consequently diverges from its Western obligations on issues that allow it strategic flexibility. This framework suggests that Turkey shifts its policies to cooperate with regional powers, often at the expense of its relations with Israel and the West. This perspective also aligns with the “Trading State” described by Kemal Kirişçi⁴ where foreign policy serves to secure export markets to fuel Turkey’s growth. While this model explains the resilience of Turkish-Israeli trade from 2009-2023, it fails to explain the sacrifice of these material benefits in 2024 while Turkey was in desperate need of foreign currency. As such, these perspectives face limitations: if Turkey was acting in order to maximize benefits, sacrificing its trade with Israel during an economic crisis would remain unexplainable.

The closest cognate to the present study is Amnon Aran,⁵ which examines a similar approach to the Turkish-Israeli relations that continued until the outbreak of the 2023-2024 war. However, Aran’s political object is Israeli foreign policy: he argues that the Israeli pivot toward Cyprus and Greece after 2011, the 2020 Abraham Accords and the rising “energy factor” shifted Israel’s policies that once favored Ankara.⁶ This article on the other hand portrays the opposing vantage point; the Turkish foreign policy.

This research proposes a Neoclassical Realist (NcR) perspective to bridge the divide; to propose a framework that takes into account the ideational and domestic contexts without disregarding systemic pressures. This model explains how systemic pressures (independent variable) are translated into policy after interacting with the domestic level (intervening variable). Specifically, I argue that Turkish policy toward Israel is shaped by the interaction of the aforementioned three specific variables. The systemic factor (independent variable) is the Turkish economy’s need for foreign cur-

3. A. Aran, M. Kutlay, *Turkey’s Quest for Strategic Autonomy in an Era of Multipolarity*, “IPC Policy Brief”, 2024, pp. 1-18; G. Özdemir, *Seta Security Radar Türkiye’s Geopolitical Landscape in 2024: Seeking Strategic Stability in a World of Conflict*, Seta Publications 2023, <https://media.setav.org/en/file/2024/01/seta-security-radar-turkiyes-geopolitical-landscape-in-2024.pdf>, (access 12.11.2025).

4. K. Kirişçi, *The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State*, “New Perspectives on Turkey”, 2009, Vol. 40, pp. 29–56, DOI: 10.1017/S0896634600005203.

5. A. Aran, *Israeli Foreign Policy towards Turkey since 2011: From Adverse Asymmetry to Equivalence?*, “International Politics”, 2025, Vol. 63, pp. 25–49.

6. Ibidem, p. 26.

rency and export diversification. As mentioned above, the systemic pressures are processed through intervening variables at the domestic level: electoral concerns, regime legitimacy, image concerns. The policy outcome (dependent variable) is therefore not a direct reflection of either economic need or ideological preference but a hybrid “decoupling” strategy designed to satisfy the economic necessity without upsetting ideational factors such as image, identity, and rhetoric.

This framework suggests that the AKP government has been successful in mitigating these two contradictory concerns by bifurcating its foreign policy. Systemic pressures prompted a powerful incentive to insulate the trade deals from political volatility while domestic legitimacy concerns demanded an anti-Israel rhetoric and diplomatic stance. The first objective of this research is to demonstrate this. However, this equilibrium was not permanent. The trade ban of 2024 marks a rupture where the cost-benefit balance has tipped. The second objective is to demonstrate how the old trade regime was disrupted.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Disentangling the paradox of Turkish-Israeli relations where economic integration coexisted with diplomatic alienation requires a theoretical lens capable of bridging the ideational factors with the material ones. This study adopts a Neoclassical Realist framework to resolve this dichotomy. This approach retains the realist assumption that the international system sets the broad parameters of foreign policy, but it introduces an interesting proposition: the systemic pressures are not translated into policy directly. Instead, they pass through the transmission belt of domestic politics.⁷ As Randall L. Schweller argues, the decision-making elites are not solely concerned with systemic concerns such as the balance of power; they are political actors who must extract resources from the international system to ensure their rule at home is not disrupted.⁸ Under this framework, regime survival is understood as an important aspect that is factored in when considering the best course to take regarding the systemic pressures.

The Independent Variable: Systemic Imperatives and the Trading State

In the NcR model, the independent variable is the restrictive or the permissive conditions of the international system. For Turkey in the 21st century, the primary concerns shifted from military security to economic survival and expansion. Following the 2001 financial crisis in Turkey, the AKP

7. G. Rose, *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, “World Politics”, 1998, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 147.

8. R.L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing*, “International Security”, 2004, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 188.

government adopted a strategy described by Kirişçi as the rise of the “Trading State,” a model where foreign policy served economic interests, mainly to find new markets for exports. Kirişçi argues that this shift prioritized opening new markets over ideological preferences.⁹

This created a systemic imperative for Turkey to expand and maintain trade relations with foreign markets. Within this context, Israel is an asset for Turkey. It is a high-income, geographically proximate market with a complementary economy that demands steel, cement, and automotive products that Turkey can provide. Furthermore, the ongoing gradual shift towards a multipolar global order prompts Turkey to reduce reliance on Western capital flows by diversifying its economic portfolio.¹⁰

The Intervening Variable: Domestic Constraints and the Legitimacy Trap

These systemic incentives, however, must pass through the intervening variable of domestic politics. Neoclassical Realism emphasizes that leaders must balance external security with internal legitimacy.¹¹ In this case, for the AKP, political power relies upon a coalition of conservative, Islamist-leaning voters for whom championing the Palestinian cause is expected.

This dynamic constitutes a Legitimacy Trap. A systemic imperative requires Turkey to align with the West and trade with Israel to finance the national economy, and a domestic imperative requires hostility toward Israel to secure the ballot box. This intervening variable serves as a filter distorting what otherwise would be the rational response to systemic pressure. When elite consensus is fractured or regime vulnerability is high, states often “underbalance” or pursue incoherent policies.¹² The state cannot simply pursue the logic of the Trading State out in the open because doing so would alienate its core constituency and risk regime survival. Neither can the state allow ideological preferences to become the sole determinant of policy, as the material costs of ignoring systemic imperatives would be economically prohibitive.

The Dependent Variable: “Decoupling” as a Policy Outcome

The interaction between these conflicting variables yields a unique policy output, or dependent variable: Decoupling. The state does not have to choose between economic necessity and ideo-

9. K. Kirişçi, *The Transformation of...*, op. cit., p. 42.

10. A. Aran, M. Kutlay, *Turkey's Quest for...*, op. cit., p. 15.

11. S.E. Lobell, N.M. Ripsman, J.W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 1–41.

12. R.L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats...*, op. cit., p. 169.

logical legitimacy. Rather, the state bifurcates its foreign policy apparatus. The economic track is insulated and technocratic, driven by private sector actors who are tacitly encouraged by the state. Meanwhile, the diplomatic track is performative and adversarial, intended to signal ideological purity to the domestic audience.

“Decoupling” is not a strategic error or a sign of hypocrisy but a strategy of adaptation to conflicting pressures. It is a stable equilibrium only insofar as the domestic political cost of the economic track remains manageable. As long as the government could successfully compartmentalize the two tracks, keeping the trade data out of public political discourse, the equilibrium held. The rupture of 2024, therefore, does not represent a change in systemic incentives, as Turkey still needs trade revenue and remains anchored to its Western alliance. The visibility of the Gaza war and the tragedy of the Palestinians raised the domestic cost of trade to such a degree that it threatened the electoral viability of the government, forcing the leadership to sacrifice systemic gain for domestic stability.¹³ Within the Neoclassical Realist model, however, the system level ultimately holds precedence over the domestic level. Even if domestic factors appear to temporarily override systemic ones, major structural reorientations such as the frequently debated axis shifts are unlikely to occur so long as the underlying systemic imperatives remain unchanged.

13. G. Lindenstrauss, R. Daniel, *Turkish-Israeli Relations at a Dangerous Turning Point*, INSS Insight 2024, No. 1853, p. 2, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/turkey-israel-low/>, (access 12.11.2025); K. Cinar, *The 2024 Local Elections in Turkey: A Critical Juncture for Turkish Democracy?*, “South European Society and Politics”, 2024, Vol. 29, Issue 1, p. 115, DOI: [10.1080/13608746.2024.2400055](https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2024.2400055).

The Decoupling Era: Systemic Resilience Amidst Diplomatic Rupture

From the late 2000s to 2024, Turkish foreign policy operated under a logic of compartmentalization. This timeframe serves as the main empirical test for the NcR framework proposed in this study. If the theory holds, we should observe a consistent pattern of systemic imperatives imposing the maintenance of material ties between Turkey and Israel even as domestic political factors require high-profile diplomatic crises and hostile rhetoric towards Israel.

To test this, this section utilizes a longitudinal comparative case study approach in order to analyze three “critical junctures” in Turkish-Israeli relations: the Mavi Marmara crisis, the 2016 reconciliation, and the 2022 rapprochement. By examining the same dyadic relationship between Turkey and Israel over different time periods, the longitudinal comparative case study method accounts for consistent factors such as geography and the balance of power while isolating the variance in domestic political dynamics. This design allows for a “most similar systems” analysis where the unit of analysis (the state) stays the same but the intervening variable (domestic factors) changes. This helps reveal the causal mechanism behind changes of policy such as the 2024 rupture. These three cases were

selected because they represent distinct variations in the intervening variable (domestic constraints) while the independent variable (systemic imperative) remained mostly constant. This selection strategy allows for a test of the insulation mechanism:

1. The Mavi Marmara Crisis (2010): Selected to demonstrate how the decoupling mechanism functions under stress. The survival of the trade relationship despite the diplomatic distancing and hostile rhetoric serves as proof of the “insulation” capacity.
2. The 2016 Reconciliation: Selected to illustrate the primacy of systemic imperatives. When regional isolation became unsustainable, systemic pressures overrode domestic ideological preferences to restore ties.
3. The 2022 Rapprochement: Selected to show the persistence of this logic into the contemporary era. It provides a control case immediately preceding the 2024 rupture by proving that the structural incentives for trade remained active right up until the final collapse.

The *Mavi Marmara* Paradox: Crisis without Sanction (2009–2011)

An earlier test of this strategic separation occurred after Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2008 and the following “One Minute” incident at Davos in January 2009. Tensions peaked in May 2010 with the Mavi Marmara flotilla raid. On May 31, Israeli naval commandos boarded a Turkish NGO-led aid flotilla trying to break the blockade of Gaza to provide humanitarian aid. The confrontation led to the deaths of nine Turkish citizens and triggered a serious diplomatic crisis. Ankara downgraded its diplomatic relations to the level of second secretary, expelled the Israeli ambassador, and suspended military agreements.¹⁴ However, the material aspect of the relationship told a different story. Despite the diplomatic downgrade, the AKP government notably chose not to annul the 1996 Free Trade Agreement. Trade statistics from this time show how well the insulation mechanism worked. While political relations reached their lowest point in 2010, bilateral trade volume did not collapse.

Instead, the trade volume between Turkey and Israel showed remarkable resilience. After the drop in 2009 due to the global financial crisis, the trade volume recovered and even rose by 22 percent in 2010.¹⁵ By the year following the Mavi Marmara incident, Turkish exports to Israel reached record

14. C. Migdalovitz, *Israel's Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, Congressional Research Service 2010, p. 13.

15. I. Güllü, M. Yazici, *Describing Turkey Israel Relationships With Its Trade Dimension*, “International Journal of Commerce and Management”, 2016, Vol. 4, Issue 10, p. 107; P. Rivlin, *Israel's Trade Relations with Turkey: An Update*, “İktisadi Middle East Economy”, 2011, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 2–3.

levels.¹⁶ This gap between frozen diplomatic relations and resilient trade relations supports our hypothesis as we can observe that the diplomatic stance of the AKP reinforces ideological alignment performatively while the demands of economic growth are upheld behind the scenes.

Energy Interests and the 2016 Normalization

The limits of rhetorical opposition became clear by 2016 due to a change in regional energy architecture. Israel discovered the Tamar (2009) and Leviathan (2010) gas reserves under the Mediterranean Sea. The Zohr reserve was discovered by an Italian company in Egypt in 2015. As Ankara viewed itself as the natural transit hub for Eastern Mediterranean gas to reach Europe, Turkey was prompted to establish necessary channels with Israel to facilitate this. Moreover, Turkey found itself on opposite sides with France, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt in the Libyan Conflict in 2020.¹⁷ Diplomatic encirclement is neither desirable nor affordable for a middle power like Turkey.

This systemic imperative forced a recalibration of strategy for Turkey. Despite ongoing opposing rhetoric against Israel, the AKP government sought a normalization deal in June 2016. The agreement was presented domestically as a humanitarian win for Palestine, but its underlying reasons were geopolitical and economic. Turkey's exclusion from the new energy partnerships in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the EastMed Gas Forum established by Israel, Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, Jordan, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority, posed a threat to Turkey's ambitions in the region.¹⁸ As a result, the AKP government used its domestic political support to justify a rapprochement that contradicted its earlier ideological position.¹⁹ This is consistent with the assumption that systemic concerns have priority over domestic-level concerns within the NcR framework.

The 2022 Rapprochement: Economic Desperation as a Driver

The 2022 Israeli-Turkish rapprochement serves as a good example of the decoupling policy. Unlike earlier reconciliations, this rapprochement included the visit of Israeli President Isaac Herzog to Ankara and took place without any substantial shift in Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. Rather, the crisis in the Turkish economy proved to be the system-level independent variable that drove Turkish foreign policy to reconciliation.

16. *Turkey Product Exports to Israel 2011*, WITS (World Bank, World Integrated Trade Solutions), <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/Year/2011/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/ISR/Product/all-groups>, (access 12.11.2025).

17. A. Aran, M. Kutlay, *Turkey's Quest for...*, op. cit., p. 14.

18. G. Dalay, *Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way out of the Current Deadlock*, Brookings Doha Center 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock/>, (access 12.11.2025).

19. G. Mitchell, *Welcome to the New Normal: Israel and Turkey's Turbulent Relations in the Post-Reconciliation Era*, The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies 2018, p. 8.

By 2022, inflation had spiraled and a currency collapse had created a significant vulnerability for Turkey's dependence on foreign direct investment and hard currency inflows. The systemic pressure to repair Turkey's relationship with Western capital markets prompted the AKP leadership to seek to deescalate regional tensions.²⁰ As Selin Nasi argues, mending relations with Israel not only ensured continuity of trade cooperation but also helped Turkey mend its strained relationship with the United States.²¹

The AKP government effectively decoupled its economic survival strategy from its ideological commitments. While Turkey continued to host Hamas leadership, it also courted Israeli partners for a higher trade volume. These developments were framed to the domestic audience as a strategic necessity that would help the Palestinians as well as Turkey.²² In this period the Turkish-Israeli trade volume climbed to \$9.5 billion in 2022, which was an all-time record.²³

For fifteen years, the AKP government successfully managed to balance cooperation with Israel and hostile rhetoric at the same time. The decoupling strategy of the AKP saw its last rapprochement in 2022, which lasted until the 2023 Gaza War and the consequent humanitarian tragedy.

The Rupture (2023-2024)

While the decoupling mechanism insulated economic ties from political volatility in the past, the severity of the Gaza War after the October 7 events exposed the limits of the viability of the decoupling strategy. The imposition of a trade ban by Ankara in May 2024 marked the break from the established balance.

To understand the factors behind the breakdown, one must look closely at the events occurring in Turkey after the start of the war. This timeline shows that the policy change was not an immediate reaction to the conflict and the severity of Israel's conduct of war, but rather a delayed response to domestic factors that might have endangered the AKP regime's stability.

20. G. Lindenstrauss, R. Daniel, *Normalization between Turkey and Israel: Will It Last*, INSS Insight 2022, No. 1637, p. 2, https://www.inss.org.il/publication/turkey-israel-normalization/?__cf_chl_f_tk=I9UVeQiHb7b.5hmQwte_RPCiPjIADvCfVqClce2THo0-1783092716-1.0.1.1-o5OGyt._AItHUGThNb7RmVwNMCE-PI5ZjgoW2D5DzjUM, (access 12.11.2025).

21. S. Nasi, *What Is New about the Reset between Israel and Turkey?*, ELIAMEP Policy Paper 113, 2022, p. 9, <https://www.eliamap.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Policy-paper-113-NASI-final.pdf>, (access 12.11.2025).

22. Ibidem, p. 8.

23. *Foreign Trade Statistics, December 2022* [*Dış Ticaret İstatistikleri, Aralık 2022*], Turkish Statistical Institute, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Foreign-Trade-Statistics-December-2022-49633>, (access 12.11.2025).

The Inertia of Decoupling (October 2023 – March 2024)

Following the Hamas attack on October 7 and the consequent Israeli invasion, the Turkish government tried to maintain its decoupling policy. President Erdoğan was quick to take a stand, calling Israel a terror state and supporting Hamas as independence fighters.²⁴ However, trade with Israel continued. After an initial shock in October, trade volume between the two countries stabilized. Turkey continued to supply essential materials like steel, cement, and textiles to the Israeli market.²⁵

Government officials were vocal about the trade volume. Trade Minister Ömer Bolat stated in February 2024 that while government and public institutions have stopped all trade with Israel, private companies are allowed to continue.²⁶ This is a common argument in the decoupling strategy meant to free the government from responsibility for economic ties.

This period shows that the need to maintain export revenue remained the key factor behind the Turkish reaction to the war for the first six months of the war. The decoupling strategy was working, filtering out the political noise to protect the economic benefits.

The Domestic Response and Concerns of Legitimacy

The balance did not break immediately, but it fell apart due to a mix of domestic pressures that challenged the government's legitimacy. While the need to trade remained as the situation of the Turkish economy was ongoing, the political cost of maintaining trade with Israel became too high electorally and socially by the spring of 2024. Three domestic factors drove this change. First, the New Welfare Party (YRP) effectively used the trade issue within the conservative bloc. They referred to the AKP's ongoing trade ties with Israel and Israel's human rights violations in Palestine and sought to siphon off portions of the AKP's voter base.²⁷ It is important to note that both the YRP and the AKP are successors to the same political party: the RP (Welfare Party). The 2024 local elections were a major defeat for the AKP government. The main opposition party, the CHP (Republican People's Party), received 37.8 percent of the votes; the AKP received 35.5 percent and the YRP 6.2 percent of the votes. More importantly, the five largest cities in Turkey chose a CHP candidate: Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, and Adana.²⁸

24. T. Gumrukcu, H. Hayatsever, *Turkey's Erdogan Says Hamas Is Not Terrorist Organisation, Cancels Trip to Israel*, Reuters 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-says-hamas-is-not-terrorist-organisation-2023-10-25/>, (access 12.11.2025).

25. *Foreign Trade Statistics, December 2023...*, op. cit.

26. *Türkiye Says None of Its Public Firms Conduct Trade with Israel*, Daily Sabah 2024, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkiye-says-none-of-its-public-firms-conduct-trade-with-israel>, (access 12.11.2025).

27. K. Cinar, *The 2024 Local...*, op. cit., p. 114.

28. M.H. Yavuz, R. Koç, *Do Turkey's 2024 Local Elections Signal the End of Erdoğan's Reign?*, "Middle East Policy", 2024, Vol. 31, Issue 2, p. 96, DOI: [10.1111/mepo.12747](https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12747).

Secondly, grassroots mobilization grew beyond the reach of traditional party politics. Youth movements and groups like “Thousand Youths for Palestine” organized protests at ports and shared trade data that often contradicted official claims. The reaction from the public made the continuation of trade politically harmful and visibly controversial.²⁹

Thirdly, the CHP, the main opposition party, used Turkish-Israeli trade relations to gain the moral high ground against the AKP. They emphasized the factual disconnect between Erdogan's harsh rhetoric and the ongoing export of steel and cement to Israel.³⁰

Just nine days after the election and the defeat of the AKP, the Ministry of Trade announced restrictions on the export of 54 product types to Israel. When this did not quell domestic criticism, the government moved to pass a decision to ban all trade with Israel on May 2, 2024.³¹ When asked about the trade ban, Erdogan argued that criticism from the opposition parties, demand from the Turkish people, and the Islamic faith of the AKP decision-makers were the driving factors behind the move.³²

Conclusion

These developments and their analysis present an interesting intervening variable to the NcR formula: regime survival concerns. Turkey still needed access to export markets and the trade volume, but the expediency of regime survival outweighed the systemic concerns. As the study demonstrated, the shift was not driven by a change in the systemic pressures but by domestic factors.

The central finding of the analysis is that the AKP government's ability to “decouple” its foreign policy from domestic sentiment collapsed under the electoral defeat. For many years, the “compartmentalization” strategy allowed Ankara to pursue a dual-track policy of harsh rhetoric against Israel to satisfy self-image concerns while pursuing increasing trade relations with Israel to satisfy systemic imperatives. The local elections of March 2024 and AKP's defeat signaled the end of this system. The rise of the New Welfare Party (YRP) and the strategic messaging of the main opposition party, CHP, as well as demand from large sections of the populace meant that AKP's credentials as a pro-Palestinian party and credibility were in jeopardy. Thus, the government was forced to align its material policy with its rhetorical stance and consequently sacrificed economic benefits for political survival.

29. G. Lindenstrauss, R. Daniel, *Turkish-Israeli Relations...*, op. cit., p. 3.

30. B. Eken, *To Punish Israel for Gaza War, Turkey's Citizens Will Gladly Suffer the Economic Cost*, The Times of Israel 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/to-punish-israel-for-gaza-war-turkeys-citizens-will-gladly-suffer-the-economic-cost/>, (access 12.11.2025).

31. E. Akin, R. Bassist, *Turkey Cuts All Trade with Israel as Ties Fray*, Al-Monitor 2024, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2024/05/turkey-cuts-all-trade-israel-ties-fray>, (access 12.11.2025).

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Theoretically, while the Neoclassical Realist framework argues that systemic pressures typically override domestic concerns, it also acknowledges that domestic factors can supersede systemic incentives in the short term. Such deviations are not unexpected within the theory. Consequently, we can expect Turkish-Israeli trade relations to normalize in the medium to long run as systemic imperatives reassert themselves.

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