



## BILATERAL RELATIONS ДВУСТОРОННИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ

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### Turkish-Israeli Relations: Partnership, Problems, Perspectives

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**Abstract.** Since the second half of the 20th century the Turkish-Israeli relations have developed in an uneven and unstable manner. Depending on the current situation in the conflict-torn Middle East, these relations tended to normalize, or descended into mutual hostility. During the 21st century, we could observe several rounds of confrontation and cooperation between the two states. Thus, the events of 2010 (the Freedom Flotilla incident) and 2017 (the transfer of the capital of Israel to Jerusalem) finally led to a rupture in relations between the two countries. A new round of stabilization has been marked since March 2022 and is associated with the visit of the President of Israel to Ankara at the invitation of the Turkish President R.T. Erdogan. The authors of the article see this step as the beginning of the process of finding agreements on achieving stability in relations between the countries of the Middle East region. The article attempts to analyze the evolution of the modern Turkish-Israeli cooperation, taking into account the patterns of their development since Türkiye has recognized the state of Israel. Using a comparative historical approach, the authors analyze the political problems of the modern bilateral relations, and consider the impact of such factors as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian nuclear program, the consequences of the “Arab Spring,” the foreign policy activities of the US Democratic and Republican administrations in the Middle East region, as well as the crisis over the status of Jerusalem. The authors underline that despite the pragmatic character of Türkiye’s foreign policy, any tension caused by the Palestinian issue will have an impact on Turkish-Israeli relations, which in turn might start a new round of conflict between the two sides. The authors have concluded that Turkish-Israeli relations are characterized by instability, which depends largely on the current balance of power in the Middle East region. It is obvious that the normalization of Turkish-Israeli interaction is a positive factor for the intensification of integration processes in the Middle East region as a whole.

**Key words:** Israel, Türkiye, Jerusalem, Middle East integration

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## Турецко-израильские отношения: партнерство, проблемы, перспективы

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**Аннотация.** Турецко-израильские отношения начиная со второй половины XX в. носили неравномерный и нестабильный характер. На специфику этих отношений во многом влияла политическая турбулентность на разрываемом конфликтами Ближнем Востоке. Выявляются закономерности развития двустороннего взаимодействия с момента признания Турцией Государства Израиль. В XXI в. отношения между двумя странами неоднократно то тяготели к нормализации, то доходили до взаимной неприязни, что приводило к переходам от конфронтации к сближению позиций сторон. Кроме того, события 2010 г. (инцидент с «Флотилией Свободы») и 2017 г. (провозглашение Вашингтоном Иерусалима столицей Израиля) привели в итоге к разрыву дипломатических отношений между двумя странами. Новый виток стабилизации можно отметить после посещения Анкары президентом Израиля И. Герцогом по приглашению Р. Эрдогана в марте 2022 г. Авторы видят в этом шаге начало процесса по поиску договоренностей в направлении выхода турецко-израильского взаимодействия из кризисного состояния. С помощью конкретно-исторического метода анализируются политические проблемы в сотрудничестве между Анкарой и Тель-Авивом, а также рассматривается влияние на него таких факторов, как арабо-израильский конфликт, иранская ядерная программа, последствия событий «арабской весны», внешнеполитическая активность демократической и республиканской администраций США в Ближневосточном регионе, а также кризисная ситуация, сложившаяся вокруг статуса Иерусалима. Отмечается, что, несмотря на прагматизм внешнеполитического курса Турции, любое напряжение в палестинском вопросе будет ощутимо для Турции и Израиля и способно породить между ними новый виток конфликта. Авторы приходят к выводу о неустойчивом характере турецко-израильских отношений, которые зависят во многом как от конкретных внешнеполитических интересов обеих стран, так и от складывающейся политической конъюнктуры Ближневосточного региона. При этом очевидно, что нормализация турецко-израильского взаимодействия является положительным фактором для активизации процессов интеграции Ближневосточного региона в целом.

**Ключевые слова:** Израиль, Турция, Иерусалим, интеграция Ближневосточного региона

**Заявление о конфликте интересов.** Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

**Вклад авторов.** Авторы внесли равнозначный вклад в разработку дизайна, проведение исследования и подготовку текста статьи.

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### Introduction

In the more than seven decades since the establishment of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948), the country's relations with the Republic of Türkiye have undergone a major evolution. Türkiye became the first country in the Muslim world to officially recognize the newly formed

State of Israel establishing diplomatic relations with it on March 28, 1949.<sup>1</sup> For Israel, it was very important to acquire a reliable non-Arab

<sup>1</sup> Timeline of Turkish-Israeli Relations, 1949—2006 // Internet Archive Wayback Machine. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090319134207/http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/documents/44edf1a5d337f.pdf> (accessed: 14.11.2022).

but a Muslim partner in the region, thus launching an important component of Israel's regional policy, the so-called "peripheral strategy" (Suleymanov, 2014, p. 165).

Having established their relations, both states have pursued similar foreign policy goals and objectives: countering the continuing military and political threat from countries such as Iraq, Iran and Syria (Korochkina, 2020, p. 218). Another factor determining Turkish-Israeli relations was the interaction of the two countries with the United States on issues of global and ideological opposition to the Soviet Union (Shuvalova, 2014). Over time, the community of interests in several foreign policy issues determined the development of allied relations between the two countries, making them key actors in the Middle Eastern politics.

However, problems in the allied relations arose when it came to controversial issues of regional agenda (Aviv, 2022, pp. 696—699). Türkiye stood firmly with the Arab countries on the Palestinian problem. Israel, in turn, supported the Kurdistan Workers' Party and refused to recognize it as a terrorist organization (Glazova, 2012, p. 50) in contradiction to Türkiye's firm and unchangeable demand to do so.

The purpose of this article is to study the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations under the changing geopolitical conditions of the new millennium. According to the authors, the leading role in this process belonged to Türkiye, namely, to the head of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), R.T. Erdogan.

To achieve this goal, the authors concentrate on the following tasks:

— examining Turkish-Israeli relations during the Arab Spring;

— analyzing the US factor in Turkish-Israeli relations, which plays the key regional role in the process of reshaping the geopolitical map of the Middle East.

The object of the study is the evolution of relations between Türkiye and Israel at the present stage. The subject of the study is the

factors that contribute, on the one hand, to the rise of the conflict potential of Turkish-Israeli relations, and on the other, to their normalization.

In order to understand Turkish-Israeli relations at the present stage, one cannot avoid their historical analysis. The consideration of the designated object of study begins with the Arab Spring, the events of which brought their own adjustments to the development of the Middle East region for the subsequent period. Therefore, the authors used a specific historical method, which allowed them to study the historical patterns of stage-by-stage evolution of the bilateral relations. The authors of the article base their study on the foreign policy documents of Türkiye, Israel, and the United States, in particular, on the documents of the Foreign Ministries of Türkiye and Israel, on the archival documents related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, on a statement of the former US President D. Trump on the status of Jerusalem, as well as on the United Nations (UN) resolutions and on documents of other international organizations.

The authors have analyzed a representative historiographical base on the topic. The publications of V.A. Avatkov (Avatkov, 2021; Avatkov & Sbitneva, 2022), P.A. Gudev (2021), I.I. Ivanova (2019a; 2019b), P.V. Shlykov (2021), M.A. Shpakovskaya and O.V. Barnashov (Shpakovskaya & Barnashov, 2018) examine the transformation of Türkiye's foreign policy within the framework of the modern system of international relations and the main geopolitical processes of the 21st century.

The authors of the article also relied on the works of S.M. Gasratyan (2016), A.V. Suleymanov (2014), A.V. Glazova (2012), which are devoted to the specifics of Turkish-Israeli relations in different — often contradictory — periods of their history. Issues of Israel's relationship with the Muslim world as well as the Palestinian problem — still unresolved — are the center of analysis in the articles of I.V. Ryzhov (Ryzhov, 2020;

Ermakov & Ryzhov, 2018). Researchers E.S. Vasetsova (2018), V.A. Kuzmin (Kuzmin & Nikolaev, 2019), A.V. Krylov (Krylov, Fedorchenko & Shuminov, 2020) emphasize the importance of the status of Jerusalem in the international legal and political context. A monograph by T.A. Karasova (2015) presenting the main stages in the formation of the strategic partnership between Israel and the United States should be mentioned for its important contribution to this article. The authors of this article use T.A. Karasova's analytical principles while studying the US factor in Turkish-Israeli relations.

A considerable number of recently published works by Western and Turkish authors dedicated to the subject of our study should be mentioned, namely A. Aran, G. Yishayahu (Aran & Yishayahu, 2022), E. Aviv (2022), S. Cook,<sup>2</sup> M. Gunter (2022), N. Goren,<sup>3</sup> M. Yavuz (2019). Also important ones are the works of Sh. Efron<sup>4</sup>, E. Elron (2017), E. Jörum (2017), K. Kanat, J. Hannon (Kanat & Hannon, 2017), T. Oğuzlu (2010), which study specific stages of contemporary Turkish-Israeli relations. Based on our historical and historiographical analysis, we can conclude that the recent year of normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations can lay the foundation for regional integration in the Middle East.

<sup>2</sup> Cook S.A. How Israel and Turkey Benefit from Restoring Relations // Council on Foreign Relations. August 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-israel-and-turkey-benefit-restoring-relations> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Goren N. Israel — Turkey Relations Are Not Only About Erdogan and Netanyahu // Friedrich Naumann Foundation. February 21, 2021. URL: <https://www.freiheit.org/israel-and-palestinian-territories/israel-turkey-relations-are-not-only-about-erdogan-and-netanyahu> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>4</sup> Efron Sh. The Future of Israeli-Turkish Relations. Santa-Monica, CA : RAND Corporation, 2018. 55 p. URL: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2445.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2445.html) (accessed: 30.11.2022).

## Turkish-Israeli Relations and the Arab Spring

The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the key factors of instability in the Middle East. In 1967, during the Six-Day War that lasted from June 5 to 10, Türkiye spoke out against Israel's actions, supporting the Middle Eastern countries that participated in the hostilities — Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan (Mohammad & Bali, 2017, pp. 90—101). At the same time, the Middle Eastern countries were considered by Türkiye as an important vector of its foreign policy (Köroğlu, 2018, pp. 309—310).

As a result of the war, Israel managed to achieve victory in a matter of days, capturing a number of territories, including the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> reshaping the geopolitical balance of the Middle East.

From the second half of the 1980s to the early 2000s, we can observe a tendency to strengthen Turkish-Israeli relations. During this period, Türkiye positioned itself as a consistent and loyal ally of the United States, supporting its foreign policy actions, in particular Operation Desert Storm, the opening of the Turkish border for the entry of American troops into northern Iraq in 1991,<sup>6</sup> following the break of Turkish-Iraqi trade relations. It was Türkiye's pro-American orientation during this period that contributed to its rapprochement with Israel.

The establishment of trusting relations between the two states in the 1980s and 1990s was accompanied by the development of

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCSM-373-67), on 29 June 1967 // Camera. June 29, 1967. URL: <https://www.sixdaywar.org/resources-documents-photos-and-video/documents-and-statements/#memorandum> (accessed: 13.12.2022).

<sup>6</sup> In March 2003, unlike in 1991, following the US decision to invade Iraq, the Turkish parliament voted against allowing US troops to use Turkish territory for this purpose. At this time, Türkiye no longer followed the policy of unquestioning submission to the United States and NATO and openly declared its claims to the role of a regional leader.

bilateral military-political cooperation. Israel saw Türkiye as a reliable ally in its confrontation with Middle Eastern states such as Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. The United States was also interested in a Turkish-Israeli rapprochement that would help expand and strengthen NATO's sphere of influence in the region.

The beginning of the new century marked a new stage in the development of Turkish-Israeli relations started. In November 2002, the *Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP)* won the parliamentary elections in Türkiye. Having come to power, party leader R.T. Erdogan announced an adjustment in Türkiye's foreign policy towards a more active development of relations with the countries of the Middle East and the monarchies of the Persian Gulf.<sup>7</sup> Its essence was formulated in the "Zero Problems with Neighbors" doctrine adopted by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2008. Türkiye set the goal of eliminating all problems in its relations with its neighbors, solving its internal problems, ensuring successful economic development and raising its geopolitical status. Türkiye, however, is trying to put such ambitious and difficult-to-implement plans into practice. Türkiye's foreign policy under R.T. Erdogan, permeated with the spirit of populism and aimed at establishing the country's role as a world power, is beginning to acquire an increasingly independent character (Avatkov, 2021, p. 544).

In the Middle East, Türkiye is normalizing relations with its former opponents — Syria and Iran, declaring and providing support to the Palestinians, including establishing close relations with Hamas, taking steps aimed at implementing economic integration of the countries of the region with the leading role of the Republic of Türkiye, positioning itself as an exponent of the common interests of the states of

the Middle East (Shlykov, 2021, p. 140). All this was in accordance with Türkiye's plans to level out contradictions with the neighboring states and was laid down in the program documents of the Justice and Development Party.

The intensification of Türkiye's Middle East policy threatened Israel with complicating already established bilateral relations. At the same time, it should be noted that before the AKP came to power in Türkiye, the main contacts between the two states developed mainly at the elite level and did not enjoy the support of the majority of the population. This was especially noticeable in relation to the Jewish diaspora living in Türkiye (Elron, 2017). At the same time, given that Türkiye is an extremely attractive tourist destination for Israelis,<sup>8</sup> we can assume that hostility on the part of the Turks coexists in parallel with the economic benefits that the Turkish side receives from the visits of Israeli tourists.

At the same time, according to the Israeli analyst N. Goren, at the level of civil society it would be advisable to develop relations between the countries, using positively proven programs within various NGOs on such pressing issues as climate change, a wide range of various regional issues, the sphere of entrepreneurial activity and several others that resonated with the population of both countries.<sup>9</sup>

Radical changes in Türkiye's regional policy in the early 2000s did not immediately lead to a cooling of Ankara's relations with Tel Aviv. As a part of its new strategy, Türkiye attempted to simultaneously maintain the level of relations with Israel that had been achieved in previous years and establish a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, inviting their leaders to a meeting

<sup>8</sup> The Number of Israeli Tourists in Türkiye Breaks Records // Lechaim. November 13, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://lechaim.ru/news/kolichestvo-izrailskih-turistov-v-turtsii-bet-rekordy> (accessed: 28.06.2023).

<sup>9</sup> Goren N. Israel — Turkey Relations Are Not Only About Erdogan and Netanyahu // Friedrich Naumann Foundation. February 21, 2021. URL: <https://www.freiheit.org/israel-and-palestinian-territories/israel-turkey-relations-are-not-only-about-erdogan-and-netanyahu> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>7</sup> Efron Sh. The Future of Israeli-Turkish Relations. Santa-Monica, CA : RAND Corporation, 2018. 55 p. URL: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2445.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2445.html) (accessed: 30.11.2022).

of the Turkish parliament to find ways to resolve Israeli-Palestinian relations. These efforts, however, did not receive practical implementation. Türkiye's geopolitical priorities increasingly inclined its leadership to intensify relations with Iran and the Arab states of the region.

In May 2008, through the mediation of Türkiye, an attempt was made to bring Israel and Syria to the negotiating table to discuss a peace plan for the disputed territories of the Golan Heights. A dialogue was established, but it did not last long and was disrupted eight months later by the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip and the Cast Lead military operation. At that time, relations between Türkiye and Israel also deteriorated. At the end of 2009, Israeli Foreign Minister A. Lieberman announced the impossibility of resuming the dialogue through the mediation of Türkiye and the desire to start a direct dialogue with the Syrian leadership.<sup>10</sup>

Relations between Türkiye and Israel deteriorated sharply in May 2010, when Israel, using its special forces, captured 6 ships of the Turkish "Peace Flotilla," that were carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. As a result of the attack on the *Mavi Marmara* Turkish motor ship, 9 passengers were killed and 30 injured. More than 10 Israeli soldiers were also injured. Following the incident, Türkiye recalled its ambassador from Israel, canceled joint military exercises (Gasratyan, 2016), protested, and demanded an apology and compensation from Israel for the families of the dead individuals. Israel refused to meet these demands, leading to deterioration in relations between the two countries.

The two countries also had opposing views on Iran's nuclear program issue. While Türkiye recognized Iran's right to develop nuclear research exclusively for peaceful purposes, then Israel was among the countries that

unequivocally condemned Iran's activities in this area. Israel even expressed its readiness — under certain circumstances — to launch a missile strike on Iran (Karasova, 2015, pp. 419—423) causing the United States to strongly condemn the Israelis and insist that the Israeli leadership should refrain from such measures without coordination with the White House.<sup>11</sup>

The events of the Arab Spring and the possibility of sliding into chaos in the Middle East spurred Iranian nuclear activities against the background of the intensification of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>12</sup> In this environment, Israel and Türkiye began to look for opportunities to pursue their independent foreign policies, which fueled their competition for regional leadership.

The rolling and uncontrolled events in the Middle East, as well as the growing instability in the Arab countries, could undermine Israel's status as a powerful regional actor. On the one hand, Israel supported the establishment of Arab regimes leaning towards democratic values; on the other hand, it was seriously worried by the wave of protests and discontent of the Arab masses, which ultimately intensified the growth of political Islam in the region (Yavuz, 2019, pp. 55—78). In this regard, almost a year after the start of the Arab unrest, Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu, speaking in the Knesset in November 2011, condemned Washington's refusal to support H. Mubarak's regime in Egypt (Pilyaeva, 2012, p. 28).

The Arab Spring phenomenon and its impact on the Middle Eastern countries, including the threatening spread of radical Islamism, convinced Israel to strengthen its

<sup>11</sup> Obama Intimidated Iran with Israel // Iran.ru. May 15, 2009. (In Russian). URL: [https://iran.ru/news/analytics/57091/Obama\\_pripugnul\\_Iran\\_Izrailem](https://iran.ru/news/analytics/57091/Obama_pripugnul_Iran_Izrailem) (accessed: 14.11.2022).

<sup>12</sup> Kaye D.D. Israel's Iran Policies after the Nuclear Deal. Santa-Monica, CA : RAND Corporation, 2016. 24 p. URL: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE207.html> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>10</sup> Israel Agreed to Türkiye's Mediation in Negotiations with Syria // RIA Novosti. March 9, 2010. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20100309/213114706.html> (accessed: 28.06.2023).

military potential.<sup>13</sup> The growing Arab discontent could potentially spread beyond the Middle East region. Issues of regional stability against the backdrop of waves of protests in Arab countries have become the key issue for the Israeli government, which intends to maintain Israel's position as the fore post of the Western world in the region.<sup>14</sup>

During the period of revolutionary unrest in the Middle East, Türkiye faced a difficult choice in its foreign policy strategy. First, the Turkish government announced the protection and evacuation of Turkish citizens who found themselves in the zone of instability. Second, R.T. Erdogan's political support to the new governments opened the opportunity for Türkiye not only to implement effective economic projects, but also to look for new ones.

During the Arab Spring, Türkiye began to pursue a more proactive foreign policy in the region, trying to strengthen its leadership among Arab countries. During this period, Türkiye began to act as a force opposing regimes that were supported by the West, fearing the intensification of anti-Turkish activities by the Kurdish population living in Syrian territory. As a result, Türkiye intensified its support for the Palestinian cause and restored diplomatic relations with Egypt, the level of which had been reduced during the time of Hosni Mubarak. At the same time, the deterioration of relations between Türkiye and Israel reflected the growing tensions in the Middle East as well as the contradictions in foreign policy priorities of the two countries in this region.

<sup>13</sup> Shlykov P.V. Türkiye's Middle Eastern Policy within the Context of the Arab Spring // Perspectives. December 17, 2012. (In Russian). URL: [https://www.perspektivy.info/book/blizhnevostochnaja\\_politika\\_turcii\\_v\\_kontekste\\_arabskoj\\_vesny\\_2012-12-17.htm](https://www.perspektivy.info/book/blizhnevostochnaja_politika_turcii_v_kontekste_arabskoj_vesny_2012-12-17.htm) (accessed: 15.11.2022).

<sup>14</sup> Dorfman M. Israel — Egypt: Changes on the Southern Front // Sensusnovus. February 17, 2011. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.sensusnovus.ru/analytics/2011/02/17/5489.html> (accessed: 14.11.2022).

## Four Years of Warm Relations, 2013—2017

The strategic military relationship between Türkiye and Israel has always been under the watchful eye of the United States. The intensification of Türkiye's Middle East policy alienated it from Israel, reorienting it towards the Muslim world. At the same time, both Türkiye and Israel sought to remain priority partners for Washington, which was shifting its focus to East Asia due to China's rapid economic growth and increasing geopolitical capabilities. While implementing the strategy of containing China in the wider Indo-Pacific region, the United States began to regroup its forces and resources to a new priority region. In this context, the Middle East region found itself in unprecedented geopolitical conditions. For the first time, a "power vacuum" occurred in the regional balance of power due to the reduction of a direct US hegemonic influence in the region. This could not but affect the two US allies / competitors — Israel and Türkiye — to compete for influence in the region.

During the US President B. Obama's visit to Israel in March 2013,<sup>15</sup> the Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu apologized to R.T. Erdogan in connection with the conflict off the coast of Gaza in 2010. However, no reconciliation between the parties followed and their relations remained tense. After the start of bilateral negotiations in September 2013, Turkish Foreign Minister A. Davutoglu said that relations with Israel were on the way to normalization.<sup>16</sup> However, a few months later, R.T. Erdogan said that to normalize relations it

<sup>15</sup> Netanyahu Apologises to Turkish PM for Israeli Role in Gaza Flotilla Raid // The Guardian. March 22, 2013. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/22/israel-apologises-turkey-gaza-flotilla-deaths> (accessed: 15.12.2022).

<sup>16</sup> Turkish FM: Israel Must Do More to Normalize Ties with Us // The Times of Israel. September 26, 2013. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/turkish-fm-israel-must-do-more-to-normalize-ties-with-turkey> (accessed: 12.12.2022).

was necessary for Israel to completely lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip,<sup>17</sup> which could be seen as a desire to gain the trust of the electorate in the run-up to municipal elections in Türkiye in March 2014 and general elections in 2015.

In the election manifesto, R.T. Erdogan<sup>18</sup> also criticized Israel's policy, which corresponded to the domestic political situation at that time and took into account the anti-Israeli sentiments of a certain part of Turkish society. Proclaiming a policy of rapprochement with Israel was risky in the context of the upcoming elections.

In December 2015, a meeting between Israeli and Turkish delegations was held in Zurich,<sup>19</sup> during which a plan was proposed to resolve the situation related to the Freedom Flotilla incident. Five points were adopted as the basis of this plan:

1) Israel's obligation to pay compensation of 20 million USD in recognition of the damage caused and the distribution of these funds to the families of those killed and wounded during the assault on the flotilla;

2) the normalization of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Israel, restoring them to the level of ambassadors;

3) the suspension of legal proceedings against the Israeli special forces that opened fire on the Turkish flotilla;

4) the suspension of Hamas activities in Türkiye;

5) the strengthening of energy cooperation between Türkiye and Israel, especially regarding Türkiye's purchase of Israeli gas.<sup>20</sup>

In April 2016, following negotiations between the Turkish and Israeli delegations in London was announced on June 27, 2016 that an agreement had been signed to restore bilateral relations.<sup>21</sup> However, the peaceful nature of Turkish-Israeli relations lasted just over a year. As I.I. Ivanova noted, this time the conflict between R.T. Erdogan and B. Netanyahu "had a certain feature that distinguished it from the conflicts of the past. If last time the parties to the conflict were Israel and Türkiye, and the United States stood above the confrontation and, on the contrary, tried to reconcile the conflicting parties, then this time the target for criticism of R.T. Erdogan was Washington itself, which recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel" (Ivanova, 2019a, p. 63).

The administration of the newly elected President D. Trump, who came to power in the United States to replace B. Obama, did not have a clear US political strategy in the Middle East, which became a big problem for the region because "the US State Department had a shortage of personnel. There were no people who could develop and put down the US strategy in the Middle East" (Ivanova, 2019b, p. 350). This fact directly affected the relationship between Türkiye and the United States. If we analyze the US National Security Strategy adopted by the Trump administration in December 2017, we will not find any

<sup>17</sup> Ravid B. Turkey PM: No Reconciliation with Israel until End of Gaza Siege // Haaretz. February 11, 2014. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/2014-02-11/ty-article/turkey-deal-only-after-gaza-siege-end/0000017f-efc8-da6f-a77f-ffceb66c0000> (accessed: 12.12.2022).

<sup>18</sup> Yeni Türkiye Yolunda. Daima Adalet, Daima Kalkınma. 7 Haziran 2015 Genel Seçimleri Seçim Beyanamesi // AK Parti. 2015. URL: [https://kurzman.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1410/2021/06/AKP\\_2015\\_7-haziran-2015-edited.pdf](https://kurzman.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1410/2021/06/AKP_2015_7-haziran-2015-edited.pdf) (accessed: 04.09.2022).

<sup>19</sup> Israel and Turkey Reach 'Understanding' on Restoring Ties // The New Arab. December 18, 2015. URL: <https://www.newarab.com/news/turkey-and-israel-reach-understanding-restoring-ties> (accessed: 26.11.2022).

<sup>20</sup> Ravid B. Five Years after Gaza Flotilla Raid, Israel and Turkey Reach Understandings on Ending Crisis // Haaretz. December 17, 2015. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2015-12-17/ty-article/israel-and-turkey-inch-closer-to-ending-crisis/0000017f-f863-d2d5-a9ff-f8ef5b880000> (accessed: 14.12.2022).

<sup>21</sup> Cunningham E., Eglash R. Israel and Turkey Announce Deal to Repair Relations after Six-Year Split // Haaretz. June 27, 2016. URL: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-turkey-announce-deal-to-repair-relations-after-six-year-split/2016/06/27/aa2399ae-3bd5-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-turkey-announce-deal-to-repair-relations-after-six-year-split/2016/06/27/aa2399ae-3bd5-11e6-9e16-4cf01a41decb_story.html) (accessed: 01.09.2022).



mention of Türkiye in it.<sup>22</sup> This indicates that a deep crisis in the bilateral relations between the United States and Türkiye had matured by that time, and the issue of the status of Jerusalem became its special catalyst.

At the same time in early 2020 the administration of D. Trump presented a plan for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which was really drafted back in 2017 (Krylov, Fedorchenko & Shuminov, 2020, pp. 387—388). The plan was initially aimed at protecting and ensuring the security of Israel, an ally of the USA.

### Crisis over the Status of Jerusalem

The US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017 and the transfer of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to this city immediately caused a negative reaction around the world, especially from Muslim countries. Jerusalem is home not only to world-renowned Jewish and Christian shrines, but also to Muslim shrines. Türkiye also joined the chorus of harsh criticism of Washington's actions. "Jerusalem is, in the perception of the Arabs, a 'red line' that cannot be crossed, and neither Arabs nor Muslims will be able to accept an attack on it,"<sup>23</sup> — Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmed Abu al-Gheit said. He warned Israel that the US President was "playing with fire and seeking to light the fuse of a serious conflict with Arab countries and the entire Islamic world."<sup>24</sup>

In this situation, Turkish President R.T. Erdogan threatened to sever diplomatic

relations with Israel if Washington recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the Turkish leader, taking advantage of Türkiye's status as the then-current chairman of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), initiated the convening of an extraordinary summit of the organization in Istanbul in December 2017. During the summit, East Jerusalem was declared the capital of Palestine and Israel was labeled as a "terrorist state."<sup>26</sup> According to R.T. Erdogan, Washington should no longer participate in the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At the same time, R.T. Erdogan emphasized the need for a political assessment of the situation by the UN.<sup>27</sup> R.T. Erdogan also noted that although Türkiye has recognized East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, it is unable to open its embassy there due to the occupation of Jerusalem, expressing hope that this will happen in the future.<sup>28</sup>

After D. Trump's official announcement of his intention to open an embassy in Jerusalem,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Turkey Could Break Off Ties with Israel over Jerusalem: Erdogan // Reuters. December 5, 2017. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-usa-turkey-idUSKBN1DZ13R> (accessed: 15.12.2022).

<sup>26</sup> Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital 'Null and Void', Erdogan Says // Daily Sabah. December 10, 2017. URL: <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/12/10/recognition-of-jerusalem-as-israels-capital-null-and-void-erdogan-says> (accessed: 01.12.2022).

<sup>27</sup> Jones D. Turkey Summit Blasts Trump Decision on Jerusalem // Voice of America. December 13, 2017. URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/islamic-world-meeting-regarding-trump-jerusalem-choice/4161688.html> (accessed: 21.10.2022).

<sup>28</sup> Türkiye Is Intended to Open Embassy to Palestine in Eastern Jerusalem // RIA Novosti. December 17, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/world/20171217/1511133752.html> (accessed: 21.10.2022).

<sup>29</sup> Presidential Proclamation Recognizing Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel and Relocating the United States Embassy to Israel to Jerusalem // The White House. December 6, 2017. URL: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-recognizing-jerusalem-capital-state-israel-relocating-united-states-embassy-israel-jerusalem/> (accessed: 20.10.2022).

<sup>22</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America on 18 December 2017 // The White House. December 18, 2017. URL: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> (accessed: 20.10.2022).

<sup>23</sup> Arab League: Jerusalem Is a "Red Line" That Cannot Be Crossed // TASS. July 23, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4433548> (accessed: 21.10.2022).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

the United States vetoed a draft resolution proposed by Egypt against recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, pointing out that as a free country it has the right to independently choose the location of its embassy,<sup>30</sup> which immediately caused protest from Muslim countries. Türkiye and Yemen addressed the UN General Assembly with a resolution<sup>31</sup> repeating the text of the UN Security Council Resolution 478 of August 20, 1980, which demanded the withdrawal of diplomatic missions of UN member states from Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup> During the discussion of this resolution, Washington threatened all states that supported this resolution with a reduction of financial aid. However, this document was adopted by a majority of votes, but had only an advisory character (Vasetsova, 2018, p. 254). Subsequently, D. Trump again raised the issue of funding the Palestinians, noting that in return the United States receives nothing from them — “neither recognition nor respect.” He pointed out that the Palestinians do not want to negotiate peace with Israel. In this regard, he said, there is no point in continuing to send them hundreds of millions of dollars a year.<sup>33</sup>

On May 14, 2018, Washington held an opening ceremony of its embassy in Jerusalem (Kuzmin & Nikolaev, 2019, p. 179). This step was highly appreciated by the head of the Israeli

government B. Netanyahu. As expected, the Palestinian side reacted extremely negatively to this fact. The Palestinians condemned the United States for violating the current balance of power, emphasizing that Washington thus recognized Israel’s right to Jerusalem, which is recognized by the world community as a city of peace. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its strong protest against this act: the corresponding press release of the Turkish Foreign Ministry stated that the United States had thus violated the principles of international law, and that this decision does not serve the establishment of peace in the region.<sup>34</sup>

Also, in May 2018, serious clashes occurred in the Gaza Strip Washington’s campaign to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the State of Israel. During the protests, approximately 60 people, including children, were killed and more than 2.5 thousand people were injured, many of them seriously.<sup>35</sup> This United States initiative had a serious conflict potential and subsequently led to a continuous aggravation of the situation: anti-Israeli forces operating in Palestinian territory retain their military potential until present. Israel, for its part, is proactive more than ever repelling the aggression of Palestinian radicals, acting in accordance with Israeli Defense Minister A. Lieberman’s the doctrine (Ermakov & Ryzhov, 2018, pp. 57—58).

The Islamic factor in itself does not play a destructive role in Arab-Israeli relations, being

<sup>30</sup> The United States Blocked the Egyptian Draft Resolution on Jerusalem in the UN Security Council // Interfax. December 18, 2017. (In Russian). URL: <http://www.interfax.ru/world/592364> (accessed: 21.10.2022).

<sup>31</sup> Status of Jerusalem: Draft Resolution / Turkey and Yemen // United Nations Digital Library. December 19, 2017. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1327365> (accessed: 29.12.2022).

<sup>32</sup> Resolution 478 (1980) Adopted by the Security Council at Its 2245th Meeting, on 20 August 1980 // The United Nations Digital Library. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/25618> (accessed: 29.12.2022).

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Official Denies That Funds for Palestinian Refugees Frozen // Reuters. January 6, 2018. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-usa/u-s-official-denies-that-funds-for-palestinian-refugees-frozen-idUSKBN1EU1ZN/> (accessed: 10.11.2022).

<sup>34</sup> No: 137, 14 May 2018, Press Release Regarding the Decision of the US Administration to Move Its Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem // Republic of Türkiye. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. May 14, 2018. URL: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-137\\_-abdnin-telaviv-buyukelciligini-kuduse-tasimasi-hk.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-137_-abdnin-telaviv-buyukelciligini-kuduse-tasimasi-hk.en.mfa) (accessed: 21.10.2022).

<sup>35</sup> Gaza: Nakba Day Protests as Palestinians Bury Those Killed in Embassy Unrest — As It Happened // The Guardian. May 15, 2018. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2018/may/15/gaza-israel-nakba-day-protests-as-palestinians-bury-those-killed-in-embassy-unrest-live-updates> (accessed: 12.12.2022).

only an addition to the political factor (Ryzhov, 2020, p. 284).

The United States, in turn, blocked a document initiated by the UN Security Council, which condemned the killing of Palestinians in May 2018 and called for an investigation into these actions.<sup>36</sup>

Ankara also did not stand idle and took several measures directed against Israel. In particular, the Israeli Ambassador and Consul General in Ankara were expelled from the country for an indefinite period. Israel responded adequately by expelling the Turkish Consul General.<sup>37</sup> The Turkish Ambassador to Israel, K. Okem, was recalled by official Ankara earlier in order to conduct the necessary consultations.<sup>38</sup> For the same purpose, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalled the employees of the Turkish Embassy in the United States.<sup>39</sup> The next summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was convened in Istanbul on May 18, 2018 and was dedicated to the situation in the Gaza Strip. The summit addressed a message to the UN, in which it demanded the deployment of peacekeeping forces on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip to ensure the security of the Palestinians.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Turak N. US Blocks United Nations Call for Independent Probe into Gaza Deaths // CNBC. May 15, 2018. URL: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/15/u-s-blocks-united-nations-call-for-independent-probe-into-gaza-deaths.html> (accessed: 26.12.2022).

<sup>37</sup> Ahren R. Israel Expels Turkish Consul in Jerusalem after Ankara Boots Israel's Ambassador // The Times of Israel. May 15, 2018. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-expels-turkish-consul-in-jerusalem-as-gaza-spat-intensifies/> (accessed: 15.12.2022).

<sup>38</sup> Gaouette N., Kosinsky M. Turkey Recalls Envoys to US, Israel Over Embassy Move // CNN. May 15, 2018. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/14/politics/turkey-ambassador-us-israel/index.html> (accessed: 15.12.2022).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The Extraordinary Meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers Was Held in Istanbul 18 May 2018 // Republic of Türkiye. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. May 18, 2018. URL: [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iit-disisleri-bakanlari-konseyi-olaganustu-toplantisi-istanbulda-duzenlendi\\_en.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iit-disisleri-bakanlari-konseyi-olaganustu-toplantisi-istanbulda-duzenlendi_en.en.mfa) (accessed: 19.11.2022).

Türkiye's attempts to intervene into the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in particular, the territorial dispute between Israel and Syria, have repeatedly continued over the past decade. In March 2019, the US President D. Trump signed a document recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and the head of the Israeli government B. Netanyahu called this event historic.<sup>41</sup> In response to this event the Turkish side expressed its concern. Turkish Foreign Minister M. Çavuşoğlu accused Washington that recognized the Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights of violating the international law.<sup>42</sup>

The deviate character of Türkiye's foreign policy mainly originates from its pursuit to use every opportunity in the world and regional arenas for the sake of Turkish national interests. Thus, Türkiye expressed support for airstrikes in Syria by the United States on April 7, 2017,<sup>43</sup> and by NATO coalition forces on April 14, 2018,<sup>44</sup> while siding with Russia and Iran in mediating a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis. Türkiye's participation in campaigns initiated by the United States and NATO is intended to demonstrate loyalty to Western countries and at the same time encourage them

<sup>41</sup> Why Are the Golan Heights Called That? // Argumenty i Fakty. March 25, 2019. (In Russian). URL: [https://aif.ru/politics/world/pochemu\\_golanskie\\_vysoty\\_ta\\_k\\_nazyvayutsya](https://aif.ru/politics/world/pochemu_golanskie_vysoty_ta_k_nazyvayutsya) (accessed: 28.06.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Israel Will Double the Number of Settlers in the Annexed Golan Heights // TRT Russian. December 27, 2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.trtrussian.com/novosti/izrail-udvoit-chislo-poselencev-na-anneksirovannyh-golanskih-vysotah-7519744> (accessed: 28.06.2023).

<sup>43</sup> Kube C., Johnson A., Jackson H., Smith A. U.S. Launches Missiles at Syrian Base Over Chemical Weapons // NBC News. April 7, 2017. URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-launches-missiles-syrian-base-after-chemical-weapons-attack-n743636> (accessed: 19.11.2022).

<sup>44</sup> Strikes on Syria "Appropriate Response": Turkish Foreign Ministry Source // Reuters. April 14, 2018. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey/strikes-on-syria-appropriate-response-turkish-foreign-ministry-source-idUSKBN1HL0C8> (accessed: 19.11.2022).

to solve issues of Turkish concern, for example, such as the Kurdish problem.

Similarly to Israel's, the pragmatism of Türkiye's foreign policy dictates the need to consider the importance of economic cooperation against the backdrop of contradictory issues in bilateral relations.

### **A New Stage: Normalizing Relations and Middle Eastern Integration**

Four years after the rupture of bilateral relations, Türkiye and Israel have agreed on the need to restore contacts. In this regard, the visit of the Israeli President I. Herzog to Türkiye in March 2022 was indicative.<sup>45</sup> A few months earlier, in July 2021, in a telephone conversation with I. Herzog, at the request of R.T. Erdogan, the parties discussed the possibility of improving relations. The Turkish President congratulated I. Herzog on his election to the presidency and invited him to pay an official visit to the capital of Türkiye.<sup>46</sup>

The visit of the Israeli President to Türkiye resulted in agreements to normalize relations against the backdrop of an unstable international situation. At the same time, the parties agreed that more sensitive issues, such as the Palestinian problem, would be resolved gradually.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in 2022, a new round of Türkiye's activities began to promote the "Zero Problems with Neighbors" policy. The normalization of relations with Israel goes hand in hand with attempts to establish interaction with several

Middle Eastern countries that are actively developing relations with Israel.<sup>48</sup> For two years (since the beginning of the 2020s), economic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, and Bahrain have been intensifying. Türkiye, trying to maintain its leading position in the process of Middle Eastern integration, is taking initiatives to resolve conflict situations between the states of the region.<sup>49</sup>

It seems that although there has been a shift on the part of Israel in resolving the Palestinian problem, its final settlement remains an important issue on Turkish-Israeli relations agenda. In case of a positive dynamics of Turkish-Israeli relations, Türkiye could be involved as a mediator in the negotiations on the Palestinian problem. However, this is a rather optimistic scenario.

On the other hand, any tension in the Palestinian issue will be very sensitive for both Türkiye and Israel and can give rise to a new round of conflict between them, which happens periodically.

At the same time, objectively, there are still reasons for normalizing relations with Israel, including the tense economic situation in Türkiye.<sup>50</sup> Economic relations between Türkiye and Israel continue to play an important role in bilateral relations. Therefore, the pragmatism of Turkish foreign policy outweighs the ideas of its

<sup>45</sup> The President of Israel Visited Türkiye for the First Time in 15 Years // RIA Novosti. March 9, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://ria.ru/20220309/vizit-1777294100.html> (accessed: 26.10.2022).

<sup>46</sup> Soilu R. Israel — Turkey: Erdogan's Call to Herzog a Fresh Attempt to Repair Relations // Middle East Eye. July 13, 2021. URL: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-turkey-herzog-erdogan-call-fresh-attempt-repair-relations> (accessed: 15.12.2022).

<sup>47</sup> Tarasov S. What Does the "New Era" of Netanyahu and Erdogan Bring to the Middle East? // Regnum. November 18, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3750043.html> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>48</sup> Selmi J. Rebuilding Israeli-Turkish Relations: A Marriage of Convenience // Fikra Forum (An initiative of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy). May 26, 2022. URL: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/rebuilding-israeli-turkish-relations-marriage-convenience> (accessed: 13.11.2022).

<sup>49</sup> Cook S.A. How Israel and Turkey Benefit from Restoring Relations // Council on Foreign Relations. August 23, 2022. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-israel-and-turkey-benefit-restoring-relations> (accessed: 30.11.2022).

<sup>50</sup> Maryasis D. Türkiye and Israel Are Restoring Bilateral Relations. For How Long? // Russian International Affairs Council. August 26, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/turtsiya-i-izrail-vosstanavlivayut-dvustoronnie-otnosheniya-nadolgo-li/> (accessed: 15.11.2022).

value-based model. Israel is one of Türkiye's ten largest trading partners. While Turkish exports to Israel amounted to 2.3 billion USD in 2011, 2.6 billion USD in 2015, then in 2020 — 4.6 billion USD. Exports from Israel to Türkiye in 2011 amounted to 2 billion USD, in 2015 — 1.6 billion USD, and in 2020 — 1.5 billion USD.<sup>51</sup>

Türkiye is interested in developing strong and sustainable contacts with Israel, primarily in the diversification of energy resources, and in the future it can become the most important hub for the transit of Israeli gas to European countries, positioning itself as a more attractive partner compared to Greece and Cyprus.

Another reason is the possibility of normalizing relations with the United States against the backdrop of strengthening Turkish-Israeli ties. R.T. Erdogan has not developed a trusting relationship with the current White House administration. Washington, like Israel, continues to support Kurdish separatists. The strategy of bringing Türkiye closer to Israel and normalizing relations with the United States is designed to muffle the ambitions of the Kurds, who threaten the integrity of the Turkish Republic (Gunter, 2022, pp. 487—488).

Türkiye's current efforts are aimed at supporting its strategic positions on the eve of the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye (October 29, 1923). The June 12, 2011 General Elections Manifesto titled *Türkiye's Goals for 2023*, the AKP pointed out the potential of the Turkish state for global expansion and providing stability in the Middle East, emphasizing Türkiye's leading role in this process.<sup>52</sup> We believe that in the

changing modern international situation, Türkiye is slowly but surely moving towards its goal of establishing itself as a regional leader.

## Conclusion

The current relations between Türkiye and Israel can be described as rather tense and unstable. Although both sides periodically show a desire to improve their relations, existing differences continue to hinder the establishment of close ties between the two countries. There are several issues on which Türkiye and Israel cannot reach agreement. These are issues of Palestinian statehood, the status of Jerusalem, the access to gas production in the Mediterranean and support for terrorist groups. Nevertheless, the current situation in the Middle East region is marked by a tendency to move from confrontation to cooperation and attempts to find mutual understanding.

At the same time, it is difficult to say how long these trends will last. In view of the historical consequences of the relations between the two countries, as well as of the peculiarities of the internal political situation and of the widening of the power vacuum in the Middle East, it is possible to predict the continuation of an unstable situation in the relations between the two countries competing for regional leadership for the foreseeable future.

The re-election of President R.T. Erdogan in May 2023 for another five-year term suggests that the Turkish leader will retain his political priorities and vectors. However, the situation around the Russian special military operation in Ukraine has visibly shifted the emphasis of Türkiye's foreign policy, which increasingly combines the role of a proactive Black Sea security guarantor with the role of an international mediator in the context of Russia's special military operation.

<http://www.minelokbeyaz.com.tr/upload/Node/2367/files/beyanname2011.pdf> (accessed: 24.10.2022).

<sup>51</sup> Türkiye and Israel Expect a Boom in Bilateral Trade // Vestnik Kavkaza. September 9, 2022. (In Russian). URL: <https://vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/turcia-i-izrail-ozidaut-buma-v-dvustoronnej-torgovle.html> (accessed: 29.10.2022).

<sup>52</sup> Türkiye Hazır Hedef 2023. 12 Haziran 2011 Genel Seçimleri Seçim Beyanamesi // AK Parti. 2011. URL:

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