



Interview Tips from the Middle East Conducting Elite Interviews in Turkey and Israel

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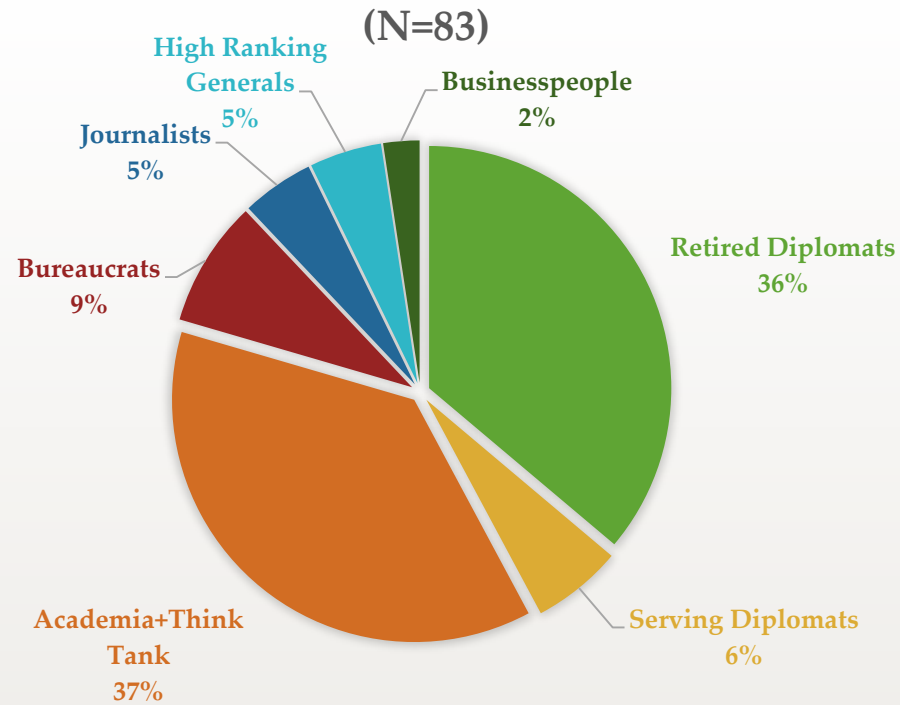
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2 | Research Design

- **Research Question #1:** Why did the decision-making mechanisms in Turkish foreign policy change between 1991 and 2014?
- **Research Question #2:** How did the change affect Turkey-Israel relations in this period?
- **Literature:** Foreign Policy Analysis, Decision-Making, Middle East Politics, International Relations (IR)
- **Methodology:** Semi-structured interview, off-the-record, note-taking
- **Respondent Profile:** Retired/Serving Diplomats, Bureaucrats and High-Ranking Generals, Foreign Policy Experts, Academics, Businesspeople
- **Schedule:** September 2017-February 2018 => İstanbul and Ankara/Turkey
March- May 2018 => Tel Aviv and Jerusalem districts/ Israel
June- September 2018 => London/UK and İstanbul, Bodrum/Turkey

3

Respondent Profile



Category	Turkey	Israel
Retired Diplomats	26	4
Serving Diplomats	4	1
Academia	17	7
Think Tank	4	3
Bureaucrats	5	2
Journalists	3	1
High Ranking Generals	1	3
Businesspeople	1	1
Total		83

4

Where to start?

- Listing the people whom I would like to talk based on serving term, level of post, countries that they were served, professions, professional relationship between each other
- Thinking about potential liaison people and contacting them before the fieldwork
- Talking about your research and potential respondents
- Scheduling 1 or 2 preliminary interviews (either face-to-face or Skype call)
- Forming the first questionnaire by considering the qualifications of potential respondents and your research question(s)

5

Excerpt from Questionnaire #1 (Summer 2016)

- 3 categories, 17 questions (too much)
- Detailed questions (too much)
- How much did security concerns play a role in shaping Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s? (I excluded this question in later versions, but asked it in a brief form when the respondent mentioned security)
- How did the 2010 Mavi Marmara Flotilla Case affect Turkey's relations with other Middle Eastern countries? (Analyzing its effect is my job, not the respondent's)

6

Questionnaires #2 (October 2017) and #3 (December 2017)

- Questionnaire #2 => 3 categories, 10 questions (still too much)
- How did the AKP reflect its ideology into foreign policy-making? (too academic and boring)
- Questionnaire #3 => No category, 7 questions
 - What are the priorities of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East in the 1990s?
 - How did the role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs evolve after 2002?
 - Is there any specific identity pertaining to “being a member of the Ministry?”

7

Questionnaire #4 (March 2017)

- Designed for the respondents in Israel
- 6 questions
- How do you see Turkey-Israel relations between 1990 and 2002? What dynamics especially played roles in the 1990s?
- How do the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state departments make decisions if the case is about Turkey?

8

Specific Questionnaires

- For an Israeli retired general =>After 2002, how did the cooperation between IDF and Turkish army evolve?
- If the respondent wants to have it before meeting
- Do not offer it unless the respondent asks to have it
- It leaves you very little room for maneuver once the respondent is familiar with the questions
- Some questions/wording might be irrelevant because of the momentum of the interview

9

How to reach potential respondents?

- Spread the word to your family, friends, colleagues, professors
- Ask the respondents/ Snowball sampling/Purposeful sampling => Useful in building trust
- Schedule some interviews just for reference
- If you research abroad, find an institution to be affiliated with and ask your colleagues there
- Phone in Turkey/ Phone and email in Israel (scheduling interviews before you arrive is a beautiful dream!)
- Mention your home affiliation (UW)
- In your introductory email, inform the respondent about your data privacy policy
- Gender and nationality in the introduction phase

10

How to prepare for an interview?

- Excel

İstanbul						
Date	Name	Profession	Affiliation	Contact Details	Reference	
5-Oct-17	Mark Doe	Prof, JSIS	University of Washington	m Doe@uw.edu	Web search/ Email	INTERVIEWED
9-Oct-17	Hannah Doe	Prof, JSIS	University of Washington	h Doe@uw.edu	Mark Doe	SCHEDULED
10-Oct-17 (Phone call and email)	Jane Doe	Former Consul General in Erbil, Iraq (2007-09)	Turkish MFA	jane Doe@gmail.com	Mark Doe Hannah Doe	DECLINED
	John Doe	Former Ambassador to the US (2003-07)	Turkish MFA Lecturer in Bogazici University	0535-xxx-xxxx	Mark Doe Hannah Doe	WILL BE CONTACTED

- Google (First 10 result pages in different languages)
- Zotero (Save&categorize based on chapters)

11

Interview Day

- Prefer mornings (10am-12pm) and avoid weekends
- Gender/culture/nationality matter
- Think to bring some pastries when you are invited to someone's home/ Ask someone if it is okay
- Always drink tea/coffee when it is asked/served
- Nodding is not the end of the world, sometimes you have to!
- Do not directly start with your questions, talk about mundane things (or about Google search)
- Let the respondent share his/her experience about your resume (schools, cities, countries)
- Avoid chat about daily politics (People tend to connect past events to today's conditions)
- Be flexible about re-wording& omitting& changing order of questions (specific questions about the respondent or specify your question for the respondent)
- Out of courtesy, ask to pay the bill

12

What to do after an interview?

- Type your notes the same day
- Describe the environment, gestures/reactions that you find interesting
- Send follow-up email or SMS a day after the interview
- Consider sending a thank you email a day after the interview
- Contact the referred respondents in a few days
- Fill in/update/color your Excel list
- Back up your data to an external hard drive every month (especially when you travel)
- Update your advisors about your progress
- Talk about your interviews, different perceptions might be helpful to find commonalities (and to avoid overrating your data)

13

I wish I would

- Not be depressed in the beginning when I hear 'no'
- Control my anxiety and allow the respondent to think a few minutes rather than explaining the question
- Actively use Twitter to reach respondents
- Write my thoughts before the interview
- Avoid scheduling an immediate interview when someone introduces me to a potential respondent

14

Thank you!

- Questions?
- Contact: gulenb@uw.edu