

ISSN: 2587-2532 | e-ISSN: 2587-1862

<http://filistin.org>

FAD- Filistin Arařtırmaları Dergisi Sayı: 12 (Kıř 2022)

BPS- Bulletin of Palestine Studies Issue: 12 (Winter 2022)

**Başlık:** Türkiye’de Yeni Osmanlıcılık Dış Politikanın Başarısızlığı: Filistin’deki Uzlaşma Süreci Örneği  
**Title:** The Failure of Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy in Turkey: The Case of Palestinian Reconciliation Process

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**DOI:** 10.34230/fiad.1193835

**Makale Türü / Type of Article:** Arařtırma Makalesi / Research Article

**Yayın Geliř Tarihi / Submission Date:** 24.10.2022

**Yayına Kabul Tarihi / Acceptance Date:** 26.12.2022

**Yayın Tarihi / Date Published:** 31.12.2022

FAD- Filistin Arařtırmaları Dergisi  
BPS- Bulletin of Palestine Studies  
Tarandığı Uluslararası İndexler/ Abstracting & Indexing

INDEX COPERNICUS | SCIENTIFIC INDEXING | CEEOL | DRJI | İSAM

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**Yazar: Mustafa Karakaya\***

**Türkiye’de Yeni Osmanlı Dış Politikanın Başarısızlığı: Filistin’deki Uzlaşma Süreci Örneği**

**Özet:** Bu makale, AKP döneminde Türk dış politikasında uygulanan Orta Doğu eksenli neo-Osmanlı politikaları incelemeyi ve Filistin siyasetinde Hamas ile El Fetih arasındaki uzlaşma sürecinde Türkiye'nin arabuluculuğu üzerinden Yeni Osmanlıcılığın neden başarısız olduğunu açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, Türkiye'nin Yeni Osmanlı dış politikasının, Ortadoğu’da nüfuz arayışında olan diğer bölgesel ve küresel aktörlerin varlığı nedeniyle başarıya ulaşamadığını savunmaktadır. Türkiye'nin neo-Osmanlı politikaları bölgede nüfuz arayan diğer devletlerin çıkarlarıyla çatıştığında, Türkiye neo-Osmanlı hedeflerine ulaşamamıştır. Makale, Türkiye'nin Filistinliler arasındaki uzlaşma sürecindeki arabuluculuk çabalarını bu başarısızlığın bir örneği olarak sunmaktadır. Türkiye, Yeni Osmanlı siyasetine uygun olarak, Filistin uzlaşma sürecinde yıllarca arabulucu rolü oynamış ve her bir uzlaşma girişimini desteklemiştir. Ancak Filistin siyasetinin iki güçlü aktörü ABD ve İsrail bu uzlaşmaya karşı çıkarak Hamas ile El Fetih arasındaki tüm uzlaşma girişimlerini engellediğinden, Türkiye'nin çabaları süreci kalıcı bir çözüme ulaştırmak için yeterli olmamıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yeni Osmanlılık, Türkiye, Filistin, Hamas, El Fetih.

**The Failure of Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy in Turkey: The Case of Palestinian Reconciliation Process**

**Abstract:** This article aims to examine the Middle East-oriented neo-Ottomanist policies in Turkish foreign policy during the JDP era and to explain the reason for the failure of neo-Ottomanism through Turkey’s mediation in the reconciliation process between Hamas and Fatah in the Palestinian politics. It is argued that Turkey’s neo-Ottomanist foreign policy failed due to the presence of other regional and global actors competing for influence in the Middle East. When Turkey’s neo-Ottomanist policies conflicted with the interests of the other states seeking influence, Turkey could not achieve its neo-Ottomanist goals. The article shows Turkey’s mediation efforts in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation process as an example to this failure. In the Palestinian reconciliation process, Turkey played a mediator role for years and supported each reconciliation attempt, in accordance with its neo-Ottomanist agenda. However, as two strong actors in the Palestinian politics, the US and Israel, opposed this reconciliation and blocked all reconciliation attempts between Hamas and Fatah, Turkey’s efforts were not enough to bring the process to a permanent solution.

**Keywords:** Neo-Ottomanism, Turkey, Palestine, Hamas, Fatah.

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## 1. Introduction

The traditional foreign policy of Turkey, since its foundation in 1923 until the 1990s, had mostly been guided by Kemalist principles. The most important characteristics of the Kemalist foreign policy were Western-orientation, secularism and Turkish nationalism. As a result, Turkey distanced itself from the Muslim and Arab world for decades and refrained from intervening in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Aligning itself with the Western Bloc politically, economically and culturally, secular and nationalist Turkey followed a very different path from those of other Middle Eastern states particularly during the Cold War period. Besides, during most of the Cold War, Turkish governments perceived the Middle East as an unstable place of conflict, which was another reason that Turkey tried to stay away from the region. On the other hand, the negative view of Turkey in the Arab countries due to the rise of nationalism and Turkey's recognition of Israel in 1949 were additional reasons that limited Turkey's influence in the Middle East during the Cold War years.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in that period, Turkey tried to follow a balanced policy between Palestine and Israel.

However, starting from the 1980s during the Özal era and making its peak in the 2000s and 2010s during the Justice and Development Party (JDP) era, a neo-Ottomanist view manifested itself in Turkey's foreign policy. Highlighting Turkey's Ottoman past as an Islamic and multicultural civilization which was a central power in its region for centuries, neo-Ottomanism proposed that Turkey should undertake the role the Ottoman Empire once played.<sup>3</sup> Critical of the Kemalist foreign policy tools such as hard power and non-interference in the Middle East,<sup>4</sup> neo-Ottomanism envisaged Turkey as the leading country in the Middle East and offered a

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<sup>1</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," *Carnegie Papers* 10 (2008): 4-7.

<sup>2</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East," *Insight Turkey* (2008): 42.

<sup>3</sup> Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," 14-16.; Edward Wastnidge, "Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics," *Middle East Critique* 28, no. 1 (2019): 7-10.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Küre Yayınları, 2001), 331.; Nicholas Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (2008): 88-90.

comprehensive foreign policy using soft power, active diplomacy, economic interdependence, dialogue and mediation.<sup>5</sup>

Neo-Ottomanism was the central foreign policy understanding of the JDP between 2002-2016 and Ahmet Davutoğlu was the chief architect of this foreign policy. This article argues that the Turkey's neo-Ottomanist foreign policy failed and aims to reveal the reason behind this failure using Turkey's mediation in the Palestinian reconciliation process as case study. The article puts forward that as neo-Ottomanist Turkey was not the sole actor competing for influence in the Middle East and when its neo-Ottomanist policies conflicted with the interests of other regional and global actors, Turkey was not able to implement the policies it had envisioned. The case of Palestine exemplifies this "failure due to conflict of interests" issue: In the reconciliation process between rival parties in Palestine, Hamas and Fatah, Turkey's mediation efforts failed as Israel and the US opposed this reconciliation.

This article consists of six parts. After this introduction section, some of the definitions of neo-Ottomanism in the literature will be presented. Then, a brief historical background of the neo-Ottomanist thought and policies, as well as touching upon important neo-Ottomanist figures will be presented. In the following section, Ahmet Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanist vision, the JDP's neo-Ottomanist policies and the demise of neo-Ottomanism will be covered. After that, Turkey's mediation efforts in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation attempts between 2007-2016 and its failure will be discussed in the neo-Ottomanist context. Then, a conclusion part will wrap up the findings of the article.

## 2. What is neo-Ottomanism?

Barchard and Yavuz define neo-Ottomanism as a "consciousness of the past".<sup>6</sup> Yavuz claims that this consciousness is constructed by cultural, literary and cognitive factors; and it is not only to shape Turkey's social and political structure but also to offer a new set of ideas and norms for Turkey to define itself.<sup>7</sup> According to him, neo-Ottomanism is about "constructing a new 'national' (*milli*, not *milliyetçi*) identity and translating it into foreign

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmet Sözen, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign policy: Transition and Challenges," *Turkish studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 115-19.; Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 952-53.

<sup>6</sup> David Barchard, *Turkey and the West*, Chatham House Papers, (Routledge, 1985), 91; M Hakan Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a post-National Vision," *Die Welt des Islams* 56, no. 3-4 (2016): 443.

<sup>7</sup> Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a post-National Vision," 443-44.

policy by using historical, cultural, and religious ties to former Ottoman territories”<sup>8</sup> and it “invokes a broad, deep complex of stylistic connotation conducive to the project of memory and nostalgia.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Taşpınar, there are three critical characteristics of neo-Ottomanism (the JDP’s neo-Ottomanism in particular). The first of them is its desire to embrace the Ottoman heritage in domestic and foreign politics without calling for Turkish imperialism in former Turkish territories or establishing an Islamic legal system in Turkey. Taşpınar asserts that this understanding would create room for multiculturalism and multinationalism at home, and for the use of soft power and a more active foreign policy in abroad. Second, neo-Ottomanism brings a sense of “grandeur” and “self-confidence” in foreign policy as it regards Turkey as a regional superpower. In neo-Ottomanist view, Turkey is the continuation of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Therefore, it should be the central actor in the region’s political, economic and diplomatic relations. Third, neo-Ottomanism embraces the West as well as the Islamic world. In the neo-Ottomanist thinking, the Turks have a European legacy. As a result, neo-Ottomanism is open to the West and Western influence.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Wastnidge defines three images of the Ottoman Empire on which neo-Ottomanism is based. The first one is the image of the Ottoman Empire as the cradle or apex of civilization. This image requires Turkey to embrace, protect, cultivate and share its imperial and cultural legacy. The second image of the Ottoman Empire as an Islamic Empire. In neo-Ottomanism, to Wastnidge, Islamism can be used as a tool against the excessive secularism, nationalism and Westernization of Kemalism; or it might refer to a real turn to Islamic values and the Middle East from the West. The third image of the Ottoman Empire as a liberal and multicultural empire. In the neo-Ottomanist thinking, the multinational and multi-religious social structure of the Ottoman Empire is a source of inspiration for democratization of Turkey, especially for the Kurdish question.<sup>11</sup>

Although neo-Ottomanism is generally discussed in the framework of the JDP period, the origins of this idea in Turkish foreign policy goes back

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<sup>8</sup> Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a post-National Vision," 443.

<sup>9</sup> Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a post-National Vision," 442.

<sup>10</sup> Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," 14-16.

<sup>11</sup> Wastnidge, "Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics," 7-10.

much further. In the next part of the study, the origins of neo-Ottomanism will be discussed.

### 3. Neo-Ottomanism Before the JDP

#### 3.1. Özal's neo-Ottomanism

To Tokdoğan, the Özal period should be marked as a period in which the Ottoman legacy first found a wide place in the political sphere in order to awaken the collective memory, redefine the national identity and reconstruct the present.<sup>12</sup> The adoption of Turkish-Islamist synthesis after the 12 September 1980 coup d'état and, as a result, the rise of Islamism and the emergence of a conservative bourgeoisie due to the economic transformation in the country were important domestic factors that gave rise to neo-Ottomanism. On the other hand, the dissolution of the USSR was a crucial international development that supported neo-Ottomanist aspirations. The collapse of the communist regimes in Europe and the independence of the Central Asian and Caucasian states created important geopolitical chances for Turkey. All these led the Özal administration to reconsider the longstanding foreign policy principles and strive to become a more active player in the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia and Caucasus. In that period, Özal was asserting that the 21st century would be the Turkish century, that such an opportunity would come every 400 years and that Turkey should create a sphere of influence in the region stretching from the Balkans to the Adriatic, including northern Iraq and Syria.<sup>13</sup>

Özal challenged traditional Kemalist foreign policy understanding and sought to enhance Turkey's regional influence and economic position in the post-Cold War world system, reasserting allegiance to NATO and to the broader Western world.<sup>14</sup> Turkey's involvement in the Gulf Crisis in 1990-91 as a part of the international coalition and its improved trade and investment relationships with the Middle Eastern states are important signs of the shift in the foreign policy.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Özal advocated co-opting rather than destroying the Kurdish dissent, strived for EU membership, took steps for economic interdependence in the Middle East and the Black Sea, and believed in decentralization, all of which are in line

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<sup>12</sup> Nagehan Tokdoğan, *Yeni Osmanlılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm* (İletişim Yayınları, 2018), 65.

<sup>13</sup> İlhan Uzgel and Volkan Yaramış, "Özal'dan Davutoğlu'na Türkiye'de Yeni Osmanlı arayışlar," *Doğudan* 16 (2010): 2-5.

<sup>14</sup> Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP," 88-90.

<sup>15</sup> Meliha B Altunışık and Lenore G Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 4 (2011): 570, 75.

with his neo-Ottomanist vision.<sup>16</sup> However, after Özal's death in 1993, neo-Ottomanist policies were interrupted and old-school Kemalist policies revived. The resistance of military and civil bureaucracy to change, political instabilities in the 1990s, security-first foreign policy approach prioritizing EU membership and economic crises led Özal's neo-Ottomanism to be shelved temporarily.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.2. Other neo-Ottomanist Figures in the 1990s**

Erbakan, the Islamist prime minister of Turkey between 1996-97, also had a neo-Ottomanist agenda but with a more Islamic, imperial and Third-Worldist tone. His vision of neo-Ottomanism imagined Turkey as a leading country in the Muslim World, which would challenge against the Western world. Erbakan's neo-Ottomanism included plans like establishing economic, military and diplomatic alliances among Muslim nations under the leadership of Turkey.<sup>18</sup> Another difference of Erbakan's neo-Ottomanism was that it aimed to homogenize the society, while Özal's neo-Ottomanism opted for multiculturalism.<sup>19</sup> Since Erbakan was forced to resign in the summer of 1997 as a result of the 28 February Process, his neo-Ottomanist vision was not able to survive. Another important figure for neo-Ottomanism before the JDP was Ismail Cem, foreign minister of Turkey between 1997-2002. Even though he was a secular politician, Cem criticized Turkey's policymakers many times for rejecting its Ottoman past, ignoring the regions where Turkey once controlled and being dismissive of the Arabs.<sup>20</sup> During his tenure, Cem spearheaded the development of economic ties with the Arab states, using Turkey's historical and cultural ties with its neighbors.<sup>21</sup>

## **4. JDP's Neo-Ottomanist Foreign Policy**

### **4.1. Davutoğlu's Vision**

The 2000s were a decade when neo-Ottomanism reached its heyday in Turkey under the conservative democratic JDP rule. In November 2002, the JDP came to power in Turkey under the leadership of Recep Tayyip

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<sup>16</sup> Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," 11.

<sup>17</sup> Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu, "Milenyum Sonrası Türk Dış Politikası: Yeni Osmanlılık ve Türk Avrasyacılığı Ekseninde İnşa Edilen Bir Pragmatizm," *Alternatif Politika* 5, no. 3 (2013): 307.

<sup>18</sup> Uzgel and Yaramış, "Özal'dan Davutoğlu'na Türkiye'de Yeni Osmanlı arayışlar," 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a post-National Vision," 459.

<sup>20</sup> Danforth, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Turkish Foreign Policy: From Atatürk to the AKP," 93; Ismail Cem, *Turkey in the New Century* (Rustem Publishing, 2001), 7-52, 97.

<sup>21</sup> Altunışık and Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," 570.

Erdoğan. When Erdoğan became prime minister in 2002, he assigned Ahmet Davutoğlu as his chief foreign policy advisor. Davutoğlu was a professor of political science with a strong intellectual and academic background. He was the person who directed the JDP's neo-Ottomanist policies, and his vision shaped Turkey's foreign policy for more than a decade. After serving as advisor for seven years, he became foreign minister of Turkey in May 2009 and stayed in this post until 2014. Then, Davutoğlu became prime minister in August 2014 as Erdoğan was elected president. He continued his premiership until his resignation in May 2016.<sup>22</sup>

Davutoğlu had published a book in 2001 named *Strategic Depth*, where he revealed his foreign policy vision for Turkey.<sup>23</sup> In fact, what Davutoğlu did during his tenure in different government posts was trying to implement this vision, which is called the "strategic depth doctrine".<sup>24</sup> In this book, he argues that Turkey must rediscover its historic and geographic identity and reposition itself in both regional and global issues. Turkey has a great geographical depth as it is the heir of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, according to him Turkey must follow an active and assertive foreign policy in the regional systems that used to be Ottoman territory and form its own axis in foreign policy. The Middle East, Caucasus and the Balkans are the land basins of Turkey where it can have spheres of influence. The Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean are, on the other hand, the natural extensions of Turkey's maritime basin. Economic interdependence is critical in the globalizing world and Turkey must establish strong economic ties with its neighbors.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Davutoğlu had other important principles for Turkey's foreign policy such as "zero problems with neighbors", balance between security and freedom, multi-dimensional and multi-track policies, rhythmic diplomacy and a flexible diplomatic discourse.<sup>26</sup>

In *Strategic Depth*, on the Middle East in particular, Davutoğlu emphasizes the importance of the Ottoman heritage and Turkish involvement in the Middle East, and criticizes Kemalist reluctance to play an assertive role in the region:

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<sup>22</sup> Gelecekpartisi.org.tr. "Ahmet Davutoğlu - Özgeçmiş." n.d., accessed 08.05.2022, <https://gelecekpartisi.org.tr/ozgecmis/ahmet-davutoglu>.

<sup>23</sup> Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*.

<sup>24</sup> Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy."

<sup>25</sup> Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," 952-53. ; Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*.

<sup>26</sup> Sözen, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign policy: Transition and Challenges," 115-19.



*Turkey, which possesses Ottoman historical heritage that managed to preserve the rich geocultural map of the region by minimizing the political risk under a permanent order for five centuries, being able to use this heritage as a strategic base is of critical importance not only in terms of Turkey's regional policies, but also in terms of establishing a just and lasting order in the region. As long as Turkey acts as a party or even a victim of this geocultural fragmentation, it cannot properly take advantage of this heritage. On the other hand, Turkey can no longer develop a regional strategy with a deep perspective by turning its back on the region or adopting a passive attitude dependent on the attitudes of global actors in the region.*<sup>27</sup>

In a statement he made in 2013, Davutoğlu made his neo-Ottomanist vision clearer by criticizing the term neo-Ottomanism:

*The last century was a parenthesis for us. We will close this parenthesis. We will connect Sarajevo to Damascus, Benghazi to Erzurum and Batumi again without fighting anyone, declaring anyone an enemy, without disrespecting any borders. This is the source of our strength. They may seem like separate countries now, but 110 years ago, Yemen and Skopje were part of the same country. Or Erzurum and Benghazi. When we say this, they call us 'neo-Ottomanists'. Those who unite all of Europe are not called "new Romanists", but those who unite the Middle East geography are labeled "neo-Ottomans."*<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, even though Davutoğlu's vision and policies fit the definitions of neo-Ottomanism stated above, during his foreign ministry, Davutoğlu

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<sup>27</sup> Author's translation. Original text: "Bölgenin zengin jeokültürel haritasını beş asır kalıcı bir düzen altında siyasi riski asgariye indirerek korumayı başaran Osmanlı tarih mirasına sahip olan Türkiye'nin bu mirası stratejik bir dayanak olarak kullanabilmesi, sadece Türkiye'nin bölge politikaları açısından değil, bölgede adil ve kalıcı bir düzen kurabilmek açısından da büyük bir Önem taşımaktadır. Türkiye bu jeokültürel parçalanmanın bir tarafı, hatta bir mağduru gibi davrandıkça bu mirası hakkınca değerlendiremez. Öte yandan Türkiye artık bölgeye sırtım dönerek yahut bölgede küresel aktörlerin tavırlarına bağımlı edilgen bir tavır takınarak derin perspektifli bir bölge stratejisi geliştiremez." See: Davutoğlu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, 331.

<sup>28</sup> Author's translation. Original text: "Geçen yüzyıl bizim için bir parantezdi. Bu parantezi kapatacağız. Hiç kimseyle savaşmadan, hiç kimseyi düşman ilan etmeden, hiçbir sınıra saygısızlık yapmadan, tekrar Saraybosna'yı Şam'a Bingazi'yi Erzurum'a, Batum'a bağlayacağız. Bizim gücümüzün kaynağı bu. Size şimdi apayrı ülkeler gibi gelebilir ama, bundan 110 yıl önce Yemen ile Üsküp aynı ülkenin parçalarıydılar. Ya da Erzurum ile Bingazi. Bunu dediğimizde, bize 'yeni Osmanlıcı' diyorlar. Bütün Avrupa'yı birleştirenler, yeni Romacı olmuyor, Orta Doğu coğrafyasını birleştirenler yeni Osmanlıcı oluyor." See: Anadolu Ajansı. "Saraybosna'yı Şam'a Bağlayacağız." March 2013, accessed 09.05.2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/saraybosnaya-sama-baglayacagiz/269218>.

denied many times that he had a neo-Ottomanist agenda.<sup>29</sup> According to Tüysüzöğlu, this denial was a pragmatic move as discourses of an imperial neo-Ottomanism would create a discomfort in a large segment of Turkish people, in Turkey's neighboring countries and in the West.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.2. Davutoğlu and the Middle East

In accordance with Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanist prescriptions, Turkey followed a very active foreign policy in its neighborhood in the 2000s. In that period, except Armenia and Southern Cyprus, Turkey seriously improved its relations with all the countries in its environs, including Russia, both economically and politically.<sup>31</sup> However, Turkey particularly focused on developing relations with its Middle Eastern neighbors, rather than the others.<sup>32</sup> In the 2000s, Turkey presented itself to the Middle Eastern states as a country which defends democracy, is in the process of membership with the EU, and has adopted a free market economy.<sup>33</sup> In contrast to its policies in the Middle East in the 1990s, Turkey opted for engagement, economic interdependence and soft power in the JDP era.<sup>34</sup> In that period, Turkey improved relations with the Middle Eastern states, particularly with Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It lifted visa requirements with Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, which resulted in a notable increase in the number of tourists to Turkey. Turkey also established new flight routes and rail links with the Middle Eastern states and signed free trade agreements with them, which contributed to the strengthening of economic ties. As a result, between 2001 and 2007, Turkey's exports to the Middle East region increased from 13% to 24%. Similarly, between 2002 and 2011, Turkey's annual foreign trade with its neighbors increased from \$10 billion to \$54 billion. Apart from these, as soft power instruments, Turkish soap operas and TV series became popular all over the region.<sup>35</sup> Turkey also actively participated in the meetings of

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<sup>29</sup> Raxhimi, Altin. "Davutoglu: 'I'm Not a Neo-Ottoman'." *Balkan Insight*, April 2011, accessed 09.05.2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2011/04/26/davutoglu-i-m-not-a-neo-ottoman/>; "Çamlıbel, Cansu. "Neo-Osmanlı Yakıştırması Kötü Niyetli." *Hürriyet*, August 2011, accessed 09.05.2022, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/neo-osmanli-yakistirmasi-kotu-niyetli-18601714>.

<sup>30</sup> Tüysüzöğlu, "Milenyum Sonrası Türk Dış Politikası: Yeni Osmanlıcılık ve Türk Avrasyacılığı Ekseninde İnş Edilen Bir Pragmatizm," 306.

<sup>31</sup> Sözen, "A Paradigm Shift in Turkish Foreign policy: Transition and Challenges," 115-16.

<sup>32</sup> Uzgel and Yaramış, "Özal'dan Davutoğlu'na Türkiye'de Yeni Osmanlıcı arayışlar," 112.

<sup>33</sup> Ertan Efegil, "AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri," *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 9, no. 18 (2016): 49.

<sup>34</sup> Altunışık and Martin, "Making Sense of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East under AKP," 569-71.

<sup>35</sup> Ayşe Ömür Atmaca and Zerrin Torun, "Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 121.

regional organizations such as the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation<sup>36</sup>, and eventually took the leadership of the OIC as a result of its increasing influence in the Muslim World.<sup>37</sup>

Another important point in Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East is its mediating role in the problems that the countries in the region were experiencing. For example, during the Lebanon crisis in July 2006, Davutoğlu visited Syria and made suggestions to prevent further escalation. In May 2008, under Turkish auspices, indirect Israeli-Syrian talks took place in Turkey, though these talks failed due to the problems in Gaza.<sup>38</sup> In the issues arising from Iran's nuclear program and the developments in Iraq, Turkey once again undertook the role of a mediator.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, as will be examined in this article in details, Turkey continuously supported and mediated the Palestinian reconciliation process.

#### **4.3. End of neo-Ottomanism**

When the popular uprisings broke out in the Arab world in 2010-2011, Turkey, in a neo-Ottomanist manner, decided to support the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy, considering the uprisings as a chance to consolidate its regional leadership role. Turkey initially called for transition by peaceful methods and the realization of economic and political reforms, especially in Syria and Libya.<sup>40</sup> However, in a few months, Turkey changed its attitude towards the developments in the region.

In Syria, Turkey began to provide logistic and military support to the opposition and called for international military intervention in Syria to remove President Assad. In Libya, it provided humanitarian aid to the Libyan opposition and participated in the military operation of NATO. In Egypt, having supported the demonstrations from the very beginning and contributed to the deposing of the Mubarak regime, Turkey established very close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, President Morsi and the Salafi Nur Party.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Turkey gave up on its "zero problems with neighbors" vision in the Middle East followed a policy that prioritized Sunni sectarian

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<sup>36</sup> Efegil, "AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri," 49.

<sup>37</sup> Atmaca and Torun, "Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy," 121.

<sup>38</sup> Uzgel and Yaramış, "Özal'dan Davutoğlu'na Türkiye'de Yeni Osmanlı arayışlar," 13.

<sup>39</sup> Efegil, "AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri," 49.

<sup>40</sup> Efegil, "AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri," 49-50.

<sup>41</sup> Efegil, "AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri," 49-50.

bonds, especially in Egypt and Syria. As a result, Turkey's relations with the Shiite regimes of Iran, Syria and Iraq were severely disrupted.<sup>42</sup> As well as Iran's support, Russia also supported the Assad regime in Syria and directly participated in the civil war in 2015 on Assad's side. On the other hand, the toppling of Morsi in Egypt in by a coup d'état in July 2013 damaged Turkey's position in the region.<sup>43</sup> Turkey's continuous support to the Muslim Brotherhood in the region also led to the souring of its relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,<sup>44</sup> eventually pushing it towards an isolation.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to isolation, by the time Davutoğlu resigned in 2016, Turkey was facing other problems such as the attacks of ISIS, the influx of millions of Syrian refugees to Turkey and the rise of the YPG (Kurdish forces that Turkey designates terrorists).<sup>46</sup> Therefore, neo-Ottomanism failed and came to an end in Turkey. After Davutoğlu's resignation in 2016, Turkey recalibrated its foreign policy under the leadership of President Erdoğan and gave up on Davutoğlu's concepts of soft-power, active globalization through multilateralism, "zero problems with neighbors" and civilizationalist realism of strategic depth. Hard power, strategic security alliances, proactive moral realism and a policy of regaining friends replaced those.<sup>47</sup>

What prevented Turkey's Middle East-oriented neo-Ottomanism from being successful was the presence of other actors seeking influence in the Middle East region. Even though Turkey has cultural and historical ties with the neighboring Arab states and it succeeded in increasing its influence over the region through soft power in the 2000s, it was hard for Turkey to be a real playmaker in the region while there were other strong actors competing for influence. When Turkey's neo-Ottomanist objectives conflicted with the other regional states and great powers, it failed to reach these objectives. Turkey's neo-Ottomanism failed due largely to the other strong actors such as Iran and Russia that supported the Assad regime in Syria, or the US

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<sup>42</sup> Tüysüzöğlu, "Milenyum Sonrası Türk Dış Politikası: Yeni Osmanlıcılık ve Türk Avrasyacılığı Ekseninde İnşa Edilen Bir Pragmatizm," 310.

<sup>43</sup> Atmaca and Torun, "Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy," 122.

<sup>44</sup> Nur Köprülü, "Turkey's Identity and Foreign Policy in Transition since 2002: The Case of Relations with Palestine," in *Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy: Examples from Europe, the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Mete Hatay and Zenonas Tziarras (PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2019), 100.

<sup>45</sup> Atmaca and Torun, "Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy," 122.

<sup>46</sup> M Hakan Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of neo-Ottomanism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 232.

<sup>47</sup> Blendi Lami, "Recalibration of Turkish Foreign Policy During AKP Era," *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 12, no. 3 (2018): 35.

which supported the Sisi regime in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood. This is also true for Turkey's efforts for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which will be covered in the following section.

## **5. Turkey in Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Process**

### **5.1. JDP's General Approach towards the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

Before the JDP's role in Hamas-Fatah reconciliation talks, it is necessary to discover its general policy towards Palestine. Even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one of the most important foreign policy issues of the JDP as part of its neo-Ottomanist vision, Turkey's desire to mediate the conflict dates back to the 1990s, especially after the beginning of the Oslo process in 1993.<sup>48</sup> However, the strategic rapprochement with Israel which began in 1996 prevented Turkey from being an important actor in the conflict.<sup>49</sup> The violence and instability caused by the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 once again brought up Turkey's mediation between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>50</sup>

After coming to power in 2002, the JDP actively strived to end the violence and restart negotiations by carrying out shuttle diplomacy between Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>51</sup> In its first a few years, Turkey followed a balanced policy and tried to improve its relations with both sides.<sup>52</sup> However, the JDP took a more pro-Palestinian stance starting from 2008. Israel's brutal military operation into the Gaza Strip, Erdoğan's criticism of Peres for the Israeli violence against the Palestinians in Davos, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon's insult to Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv and the Mavi Marmara incident in which Israeli forces stormed a Turkish flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza in international waters heavily damaged the relationship between Turkey and Israel, ending Turkey's mediator role.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Turkey continued to support

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<sup>48</sup> Esengül Ayaz Avan, "Europeanization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey's Mediation in the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 6 (2019): 9.

<sup>49</sup> Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," 958.

<sup>50</sup> Ayaz Avan, "Europeanization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey's Mediation in the Israel-Palestine Conflict," 9.

<sup>51</sup> Ayaz Avan, "Europeanization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey's Mediation in the Israel-Palestine Conflict," 9.

<sup>52</sup> Sabri Çiftçi, "Soft Power, Domestic Dividends, and Turkish Foreign Policy: The Case of Palestine," in *Inter-State and Intra-State Conflicts in Global Politics: From Eurasia to China*, ed. Tayyar Arı (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Ayaz Avan, "Europeanization of Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Case of Turkey's Mediation in the Israel-Palestine Conflict," 11.; Mohammed Alsaftawi, *Turkish policy towards Israel and Palestine: Continuity and Change in the Relations of the Turkish-Palestinian-Israeli Triangle under the*

Palestine using soft power, as part of its neo-Ottomanist vision. The Turkish Red Crescent, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı*, abbreviated TİKA), Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, abbreviated YTB), Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, abbreviated YTB), Yunus Emre Institute (*Yunus Emre Enstitüsü*, abbreviated YEE), the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, known as Diyanet) and NGOs such as the IHH played a crucial role to alleviate the sufferings of the Palestinians providing them with financial, infrastructural, educational and professional support, as well as carrying out cultural activities.<sup>54</sup>

## **5.2. Turkey's Mediation in Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Process**

### **5.2.1. First Reconciliation Attempts**

In the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, Hamas, the Islamist group, defeated Fatah, the largest faction under Arab nationalist and socialist Palestine Liberation Organization, and obtained the right to form the government. However, Hamas' victory was not welcomed by Israel and the US.<sup>55</sup> After Hamas' victory, they put pressure on the Palestinian National Authority to convince Hamas to accept three conditions put forward by the Middle East Quartet:<sup>56</sup> renouncing violence, recognizing Israel and accepting previous agreements between Israel and the PNA. The meetings between Fatah and Hamas were not fruitful and Hamas refused to meet these conditions. As a result, the US and Israel began to sanction the Hamas government to isolate it economically and financially. Besides, the US began to train and equip Fatah forces against Hamas to stage a coup d'état. Even though Hamas and Fatah formed a unity government in March 2007, that did not stop the disagreements between the parties and bloody conflicts took place on the streets. In June 2007, anticipating the imminent coup d'état, Hamas captured the Gaza Strip and established its control there.

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*Rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)(2002-2016)* (Doctoral Dissertation, Ghent University, 2017), 183-206.

<sup>54</sup> Helin Sarı Ertem, "Filistin'in Sosyo-Ekonomik Sıkıntılarının Giderilmesinde Türkiye'nin İmkân ve Sınırları," *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (2019): 147-57.

<sup>55</sup> Israel and the US designates Hamas a terrorist organization. See: Middle East Eye. "Australia Says It Will Designate Hamas as a Terrorist Organisation." February 2022, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/australia-palestine-declare-hamas-terrorist-organisation>.

<sup>56</sup> The Middle East Quartet is a body formed in 2002 in order to "help mediate Middle East peace negotiations and to support Palestinian economic development and institution-building in preparation for eventual statehood." It consists of the US, Russia, the UN and the EU. See: UNSCO. "Middle East Quartet." 2022, accessed 06.01.2022, <https://unsco.unmissions.org/mideast-quartet>

Fatah, on the other hand, dissolved the incumbent government and established a new Fatah-led government in the West Bank. Thus, the political power in Palestine was split into two: Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip, and Fatah controlling the West Bank. Since then, Hamas and Fatah have been in a process of reconciliation.<sup>57</sup>

A few days after Hamas' takeover of Gaza, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing Turkey's concerns regarding the division of power in Palestine. The statement characterized the division as "harmful" and called on the parties to come together for reconciliation.<sup>58</sup> In November 2007, Ali Babacan, then foreign minister of Turkey, stated that the rift between the Palestinians casted a shadow on the resolution process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Babacan stated that for the success of the Palestinian cause, the parties must come together and unite, adding, "There cannot be two Palestines".<sup>59</sup> In March 2008, Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal in Sana'a where the parties pledged to continue dialogue for Palestinian unity. However, the day the agreement was signed, Dick Cheney, then vice president of the US, underlined that those who advocated peace and reconciliation should help combatting the "forces of terror and extremism", referring to Hamas.<sup>60</sup> The following day, Cheney stated that his conclusion from his talks with the Palestinian leadership that the PNA established preconditions for a reconciliation with Hamas, including Hamas relinquishing its power in Gaza.<sup>61</sup> These statements further fueled the already existing disagreements between the parties and the first

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<sup>57</sup> In this article, the reconciliation efforts between Hamas and Fatah will be covered largely through author's master's thesis defended in 2021 and the sources used in this thesis. See: Mustafa Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020" (Master's Middle East Technical University, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No:94/- 19 June 2007, Press Statement Regarding Events;in Gaza and the Dissolution of the National Unity Government." June 2007, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/\\_p\\_no\\_94\\_-19-june-2007\\_-press-statement-regarding-events\\_in-gaza-and-the-dissolution-of-the-national-unity-government\\_-\\_unofficial-translation\\_-\\_p\\_en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_no_94_-19-june-2007_-press-statement-regarding-events_in-gaza-and-the-dissolution-of-the-national-unity-government_-_unofficial-translation_-_p_en.mfa).

<sup>59</sup> Author's translation. Original text: "*İki Filistin olamaz.*" See: Milli Gazete. "Babacan: İhtiyatlı İyimserlik İçindeyiz." November 2007, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/803254/babacan-filistin-deki-ikili-yapi-son-bulmali>.

<sup>60</sup> The White House. "Remarks by Vice President Cheney and Palestinian Authority President Abbas." March 2008, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/03/20080323-1.html>.

<sup>61</sup> France 24. "Cheney Doubtful on Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation." March 2008, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/20080324-cheney-doubtful-hamas-fatah-reconciliation-palestinian-territories-israel>



reconciliation attempt crumbled only in a few days.<sup>62</sup> The objection of the US was an important reason for this failure and the support of neo-Ottomanist Turkey and Yemen was not enough to trivialize the US' objection.

In December 2008, the Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey stated that Azam al-Ahmad, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, went to Turkey as the special representative of Mahmoud Abbas, President of Palestine, and gave information on the peace process between Palestine and Israel, and on the developments on Palestinian reconciliation efforts, as well as conveying Abbas' request that Turkey contribute to the reconciliation process. The spokesman stated that Turkey supported all efforts aiming at peace and stability in the Middle East and was ready to contribute if requested and a concrete demand was made.<sup>63</sup> In 2009, Hamas and Fatah were again holding reconciliation talks. Concerning these talks, in August 2009, Burak Özügergin, then Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey stated,

*Within the framework of our general perspective on the Middle East, the Minister has had various initiatives. Mr. Abbas has visited our country recently. Our Prime Minister has visited Syria. Of course, I don't know the details, but whether you call it mediation, facilitation, or a benevolent neighbor, some of Turkey's suggestions have been to all parties. The backbone of these suggestions was the message that the continuation of the conflict between the Palestinians would harm the cause itself. The message that you need to compromise and you need to do this as soon as possible was given to all parties.<sup>64</sup>*

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<sup>62</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 97.

<sup>63</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Qa:31 - 18 December 2008, Statement of the Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey in Response to a Question." December 2008, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/qa\\_31---18-december-2008\\_-statement-of-the-spokesman-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-in-response-to-a-question-\\_unofficial-translation\\_.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/qa_31---18-december-2008_-statement-of-the-spokesman-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-in-response-to-a-question-_unofficial-translation_.en.mfa).

<sup>64</sup> Author's translation. Original text: "Orta Doğu'ya genel bakış açımız çerçevesinde Sayın Bakanın muhtelif girişimleri oldu. Sayın Abbas ülkemizi ziyaret etti geçenlerde. Başbakanımız Suriye'yi ziyaret etti. Tabii ki ayrıntıları bilmem söz konusu değil, ama ister arabuluculuk deyin, ister kolaylaştırıcılık deyin, ister müşfik bir komşunun telkinleri deyin, Türkiye'nin bazı telkinleri tüm taraflara olmuştur. Bu telkinlerin belkemiğini Filistinliler arasındaki uzlaşmazlığın sürmesinin bizzat davaya zarar vereceği mesajı oluşturmıştır. Uzlaşmanız lazım ve bunu biran önce yapmanız lazım mesajı tüm taraflara verildi." See: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Dışişleri Bakanlığı Sözcüsü Sayın Burak Özügergin'in Olağan Basın Toplantısı, 5 Ağustos 2009." August 2009, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakanligi-sozcusu-sayin-burak-ozugergin\\_in-olagan-basin-toplantisi\\_-5-agustos-2009\\_-tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakanligi-sozcusu-sayin-burak-ozugergin_in-olagan-basin-toplantisi_-5-agustos-2009_-tr.mfa).



However, for the ongoing talks between Hamas and Fatah, US president Obama said that America could only work with an interim government that accepted the above-mentioned conditions of the Quartet.<sup>65</sup> That was a big blow to the talks as Hamas was unwilling to accept them. As a result, no reconciliation was reached in 2009.<sup>66</sup> Here, the US' opposition prevented any reconciliation, despite the mediation efforts of Turkey. Even though the US was a supporter of Turkey's neo-Ottomanist agenda, when Turkey's neo-Ottomanism and mediation efforts conflicted with the US interests in Palestine, it was the US that reached its objectives.

### **5.2.2. Talks in 2010**

In 2010, Hamas and Fatah continued reconciliation talks. In the meantime, then prime minister Erdoğan said that they can achieve peace between Hamas and Fatah. Stating that he had discussed this issue with Hamas, Erdoğan said that he would hold similar talks with Fatah.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, then foreign minister Davutoğlu stated in a press conference that intra-Palestinian reconciliation was a priority and the Palestinian had been called upon to achieve unity.<sup>68</sup> Hamas and Fatah made some progress on issues like the reorganization of the PLO, formation of an election committee and releasing prisoners; though were not able to solve security-related issues.<sup>69</sup> During the talks, the US and Israel conveyed their messages to Abbas that they had red lines about security. They demanded that Abbas would control security and Hamas would be disarmed. As Hamas was unwilling to accept these demands, talks did not bear fruit.<sup>70</sup> Israel, a strong regional actor and a party to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, together with the US, undermined the reconciliation talks and prevented Turkey's mediation in the reconciliation process from producing a positive outcome in 2010.

### **5.2.3. Cairo and Doha Agreements**

In the spring of 2011, Hamas and Fatah held another round of talks by request of the Palestinian people who were influenced by the Arab Spring.

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<sup>65</sup> Tareq Baconi, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* (Stanford University Press, 2018), 162-63.

<sup>66</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 102-03.

<sup>67</sup> BBC Türkçe. "Erdoğan: Gazze Ablukasının Kaldırılma Zamanı Geldi." June 2010, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2010/06/100607\\_erdogan\\_israel](https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2010/06/100607_erdogan_israel).

<sup>68</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Türkiye, Suriye Ve Katar Üçlü Toplantısı Hakkında Basın Açıklaması." May 2010, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye\\_-suriye-ve-katar-uclu-toplantisi-hakkinda-basin-aciklamasi-\\_9-mayis-2010\\_tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_-suriye-ve-katar-uclu-toplantisi-hakkinda-basin-aciklamasi-_9-mayis-2010_tr.mfa)

<sup>69</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 106.

<sup>70</sup> Baconi, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance*, 169.

As a result, the parties signed the Cairo Agreement. This agreement proposed that an election committee and an election tribunal would be appointed, elections would be held within one year, a supreme security council would be appointed jointly and an interim government composed of technocrats would take office.<sup>71</sup> Upon this, Erdoğan stated that he was very happy with the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas in Palestine. He said, "This is something we have wanted to see for years. During my prime ministry, I worked hard for years to unite Fatah and Hamas, and now we are very happy to see it happen."<sup>72</sup> However, Israel and the US opposed the agreement. Israeli prime minister Netanyahu said, "What happened today in Cairo is a mortal blow to peace and a great victory for terrorism."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Obama stated that the agreement raised "profound and legitimate questions for Israel" and asked, "How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist?"<sup>74</sup> A few days later, Obama also stated that "the recent agreement between Fatah and Hamas poses an enormous obstacle to peace" and reminded the three principles of the Quartet.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the US Senate passed a resolution opposing the Hamas' presence in a Palestinian unity government as far as it insisted on not accepting the Quartet's conditions.<sup>76</sup> American and Israeli reactions led to disagreements between Fatah and Hamas, in addition to problems regarding power-sharing. Negotiations were not cancelled but deferred this time.<sup>77</sup>

In the last quarter of 2011, talks between Hamas and Fatah restarted. Turkey continued its mediation in these talks. In December, Davutoğlu held

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<sup>71</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 106-07.

<sup>72</sup> Author's translation. Original text: "Bu, yıllardır görmeyi istediğimiz birşeydi. Başbakanlığım döneminde, yıllarca El Fetih ve Hamas'ı birleştirmek için çok gayret sarfettim ve şimdi bunun gerçekleştiğini görmekten çok mutluyuz." See: NTV Haber. "Erdoğan: Hamas Terör Örgütü Değil." May 2011, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-hamas-teror-orgutu-degil,\\_MwF-ZW10kmGJUIItKAGxA](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-hamas-teror-orgutu-degil,_MwF-ZW10kmGJUIItKAGxA).

<sup>73</sup> Haaretz. "Netanyahu: Hamas-Fatah Unity Pact Is a Victory for Terrorism." May 2011, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5007918>.

<sup>74</sup> The White House. "Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa." 18 May 2011, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa>.

<sup>75</sup> The White House. "Remarks by the President at the Aipac Policy Conference 2011." 22 May 2011, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/22/remarks-president-aipac-policy-conference-2011>.

<sup>76</sup> US Senate. "S.Res.185.", June 2011, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/senate-resolution/185/text>.

<sup>77</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 108.

a joint press conference with Abbas. In that press conference, Davutoğlu stated that there were very positive developments on the road to reconciliation and thanked Abbas for his leadership in the reconciliations talks.<sup>78</sup> In the following days, Mashal and Abbas continued talks. Turkey's foreign ministry issued a statement supporting the process.<sup>79</sup> A few days later, Ismail Haniyeh, then Hamas leader in Gaza, went to Turkey and met Erdoğan. In this meeting, Erdoğan expressed his contentment with efforts that had been intensified recently to ensure unity and solidarity among the Palestinians and reiterated his wishes for Palestinian unity.<sup>80</sup> In February 2012, Hamas and Fatah signed the Doha Agreement. The Doha Agreement proposed that Abbas, as the premier, would form an interim technocratic government. The reformation of the PLO would take place and committees dealing with issues such as prisoners and elections would keep working. Moreover, Hamas was not to have important ministries in this government.<sup>81</sup> Upon this, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey issued a statement welcoming the Doha Agreement and expressing appreciation to the parties. In the statement, the Doha Agreement was characterized as an important step for the implementation of the Cairo Agreement signed in May 2011. The statement also emphasized that Turkey would continue to support endeavors aiming at solidarity and unity in Palestine.<sup>82</sup>

However, the Israeli and American view of the Doha Agreement was negative. While Netanyahu stated that the PNA must make a choice between an alliance with Hamas and peace process with Israel,<sup>83</sup> the US

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<sup>78</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Sayın Bakanın Filistin Devlet Başkanı Mahmud Abbas İle Gerçekleştirdiği Basın Açıklamasının Metni." December 2011, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanin-filistin-devlet-baskani-mahmud-abbas-ile-gerceklestirdigi-basin-aciklamasi.tr.mfa>.

<sup>79</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No.308, Press Release Regarding the Meeting between the President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas Leader Halid Mashaal." December 2011, accessed 22.05.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_308\\_-\\_press-release-regarding-the-meeting-between-the-president-of-palestine-mahmoud-abbas-and-hamas-leader-halid-mashaal.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_308_-_press-release-regarding-the-meeting-between-the-president-of-palestine-mahmoud-abbas-and-hamas-leader-halid-mashaal.en.mfa).

<sup>80</sup> Anadolu Ajansı. "Filistin İçin Birliktelik Mesajı Verdi." January 2012, accessed 22.05.2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/filistin-icin-birliktelik-mesaji-verdi/387184>.

<sup>81</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 109.

<sup>82</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No: 40, 10 February 2012, Press Release Regarding the Doha Declaration." February 2012, accessed 22.02.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-40\\_-10-february-2012\\_-\\_press-release-regarding-the-doha-declaration.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-40_-10-february-2012_-_press-release-regarding-the-doha-declaration.en.mfa).

<sup>83</sup> Krieger, Zvika. "Does Obama Really Support the Hamas-Fatah Unity Agreement?" *The Atlantic*, February 2012, accessed 01.06.2022,

stated that Hamas was a terrorist organization and reiterated that Hamas must give up its power in the Gaza Strip, recognize Israel and accept the previous agreements.<sup>84</sup> Israel also launched a military operation into Gaza claiming that it was pre-empting an imminent attack. Hamas and Fatah once again failed to form a unity government. That was partly due to their own power-sharing problems such as who would be the prime minister or Hamas' negative manner against the election committee in Gaza. However, the opposition and pressure of Israel and the US was crucial.<sup>85</sup> The implementation of the Cairo and Doha agreements was again blocked by the US and Israel, in spite of Turkey's mediation.

#### 5.2.4. Unity Government of 2014

The final reconciliation effort between Fatah and Hamas during Turkey's neo-Ottomanist era was the unity government of 2014. In April 2014, Fatah, Hamas and other PLO factions signed an agreement. According to this agreement, an interim government that consisted of technocrats would be established in five weeks and elections would be held within six months. Hamas would not have any seats in this government and relinquish its power in Gaza in favor of the unity government.<sup>86</sup> Turkey welcomed the agreement. Turkey's foreign ministry stated, "We hope that this agreement will pave the way for the formation of a government which will embrace all Palestinians through elections expected to be held until the end of the year and a just and comprehensive peace in the region."<sup>87</sup> Israel and the US did not react positively. Netanyahu said the agreement was "a great reverse for peace".<sup>88</sup> Jen Psaki, then US State Department spokesperson, stated they

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/02/does-obama-really-support-the-hamas-fatah-unity-agreement/253110/>.

<sup>84</sup> US Department of State Archive. "Daily Press Briefing - February 6, 2012." February 2012, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/02/183454.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 111.

<sup>86</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 116.

<sup>87</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No: 127, 24 April 2014, Press Release Regarding the Reconciliation Agreement Reached between Fatah and Hamas." April 2014, accessed 01.06.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-127\\_-24-april-2014\\_-press-release-regarding-the-reconciliation-agreement-reached-between-fatah-and-hamas.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-127_-24-april-2014_-press-release-regarding-the-reconciliation-agreement-reached-between-fatah-and-hamas.en.mfa).

<sup>88</sup> Black, Ian, Peter Beaumont, and Dan Roberts. "Israel Suspends Peace Talks with Palestinians after Fatah-Hamas Deal." The Guardian, April 2014, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/middle-east-israel-halts-peace-talks-palestinians>.

were disappointed and the deal “could seriously complicate” peace efforts.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, President Obama said the agreement was “unhelpful”.<sup>90</sup>

After the unity government took office in June 2014, Turkey expressed its contentment with a statement issued by its foreign ministry. In this statement, Turkey congratulated all the Palestinians and characterized the formation of the unity government as the “first step in eliminating the division between the Palestinians.”<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, Jen Psaki said that they could work with the technocratic government as it did not include any members from Hamas but underlined that the US would watch the new government closely whether it could comply with the Quartet’s three conditions and would act accordingly.<sup>92</sup> Upon this, Netanyahu condemned the US stating that it was collaborating with Hamas.<sup>93</sup> Besides, Israel applied new sanctions on the unity government and announced a plan to construct new settlements in the West Bank. Most importantly, in July, citing the murdering of three Israeli teenagers from the West Bank, Israel launched a large-scale operation into Gaza: Operation Protective Edge. The stated aim was to destroy Hamas’s military capacity, while the real reason was to undermine the unity government. The operation lasted around 50 days and cost the lives of 2251 Palestinians, as well as destroying the infrastructure in Gaza. During the operation, the US supported Israel characterizing its actions as self-defense and blamed Hamas for the incidents.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, Davutoğlu stated that the operation aimed to destroy the unity government. Davutoğlu also said when Abbas demanded help from the

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<sup>89</sup> Reuters. "U.S. Says 'Disappointed' by Palestinian Unity Deal." April 2014, accessed 01.06.2024, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinian-israel-usa/u-s-says-disappointed-by-palestinian-unity-deal-idUSBREA3M1NE20140424>.

<sup>90</sup> Ahram Online. "Obama Says Abbas Unity Push with Hamas 'Unhelpful'." April 2014, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsAFCON/2017/99783.aspx>.

<sup>91</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No: 183, 2 June 2014, Press Release Regarding the Establishment of the National Unity Government in Palestine." June 2012, accessed 02.06.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-183\\_-2-june-2014\\_-press-release-regarding-the-establishment-of-the-national-unity-government-in-palestine.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-183_-2-june-2014_-press-release-regarding-the-establishment-of-the-national-unity-government-in-palestine.en.mfa).

<sup>92</sup> Wroughton, Lesley and Patricia Zengerle. "Obama Administration to Work with Palestinian Unity Government." Reuters, June 2014, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinian-unity-usa/obama-%20administration-to-work-with-palestinian-unity-government-%20idUSKBN0ED1VQ20140603>

<sup>93</sup> Beaumont, Peter. "Israel Condemns US for Backing Palestinian Unity Government." The Guardian, June 2014, accessed 01.06.2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/03/israel-us-palestinian-unity-government-netanyahu>.

<sup>94</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 117-20.

Turkish government, he had answered by stipulating that the unity government would not be dissolved and both Hamas and Fatah agreed this condition. Then, Turkey stepped in for a ceasefire.<sup>95</sup>

Operation Protective Edge damaged the unity government. As it gained some power due to its resistance in the Operation Protective Edge and easing of the blockade by Israel, Hamas did not want to relinquish its hold in Gaza. Power-sharing problems persisted and the unity government came to an end in June 2015.<sup>96</sup> Israel's fervent opposition to a reconciliation and its operation into the Gaza Strip, the US' insistence on the Quartet's conditions and its support to Israel during the operation, and Hamas' unwillingness to comply with the conditions of the Quartet led to the dissolution of the unity government. Turkey's efforts for the continuation of the unity government were lost amidst these negative developments, even though Hamas and Fatah promised Davutoğlu that they would keep the unity government alive.

Hamas and Fatah held talks in late 2015 and early 2016 as well, but no serious progress was made.<sup>97</sup> The parties took other significant steps for reconciliation in 2017 and 2020-2021. Turkey supported and mediated those,<sup>98</sup> but not in a neo-Ottomanist context as Turkey's neo-Ottomanism ended in 2016 with Davutoğlu's resignation from premiership.

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<sup>95</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Dışışleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Trt Türk Televizyonuna Verdikleri Özel Mülakat, 26 Temmuz 2014, Paris." July 2014, accessed 02.06.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu\\_nun-trt-turk-televizyonuna-verdikleri-ozel-mulakat\\_-26-temmuz-2014\\_-paris.tr.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-trt-turk-televizyonuna-verdikleri-ozel-mulakat_-26-temmuz-2014_-paris.tr.mfa).

<sup>96</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 120-21.

<sup>97</sup> Karakaya, "Hamas and the United States: Conflicting Visions and Policies in Palestine from 1987 to 2020," 121.

<sup>98</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No: 293, 17 September 2017, Press Release Regarding the Statement Made by Hamas on Reconciliation." September 2017, accessed 02.06.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-293\\_-hamas-tarafından-ic-uzlasi-sureci-baglamında-yapılan-beyanat-hk\\_en.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-293_-hamas-tarafından-ic-uzlasi-sureci-baglamında-yapılan-beyanat-hk_en.en.mfa); Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "No: 19, 16 January 2021, Press Release Regarding the Presidential Decree on Holding of Elections in Palestine." January 2021, accessed 02.06.2022, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-19\\_-filistin-de-secimlerin-duzenlenmesine-iliskin-baskanlik-kararnamesi-hk.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-19_-filistin-de-secimlerin-duzenlenmesine-iliskin-baskanlik-kararnamesi-hk.en.mfa).

## 6. Conclusion

Neo-Ottomanism brought about an alternative approach to Turkish foreign policy. However, this policy could not succeed in reaching its aims. Davutoğlu's neo-Ottomanism failed to turn Turkey into the central power in the Middle East enjoying peace and prosperity, but Turkey found itself isolated in the region<sup>99</sup>, suffering from serious diplomatic and security problems by 2016.<sup>100</sup>

Turkey's failure stemmed from the difference of interests with other strong states. Its neo-Ottomanist policies were at odds with the interests of various actors in various cases, and Turkey was not ready for such confrontations. If a country aims to be a regional power, it must have all the sources necessary to compete with other actors. The failure in the unification of political power in Palestine was one of these cases that included conflicting interests. Turkey always supported the reconciliation efforts between Hamas and Fatah wholeheartedly, and acted as an active mediator between the parties. However, there were other states which had a more decisive place in the Palestinian case than that of Turkey: the US and Israel. In all reconciliation efforts that took place between 2007 and 2016, Israel and the US invalidated Turkey's efforts for reconciliation by putting leverage on Hamas to accept their conditions, by forcing Fatah to convince Hamas to accept these conditions or by threatening Fatah with stopping the peace process and cutting aid. In 2014, Israel even organized one of its biggest military offensives to Gaza just to undermine the unity government. That is to say, since the US and Israel were determined to undermine the process, Turkey's support for reconciliation efforts were not enough.

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<sup>99</sup> Atmaca and Torun, "Geopolitical Visions in Turkish Foreign Policy," 122.

<sup>100</sup> M Hakan Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of neo-Ottomanism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 232.



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