

## “DURING THE AKP PERIOD, THE ROLE OF DAVUTOĞLU IN TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST POLICY”

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### Introduction

The Middle East's emergence as a focal point of global interest came about in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution during the 18th and 19th centuries. With industrial advancements, there arose a substantial need for raw materials, prompting Western nations, leaders in industrialization, to turn their attention to the Middle East, particularly due to its abundant oil reserves. While Turkey, aspiring to attain the standards of Western civilizations as part of its Western-oriented modernization agenda, endeavored to steer clear of the power struggles in its neighboring region as much as possible, conflicts, political upheavals, and economic downturns in the region occasionally impacted Turkey directly or indirectly.

In such a period, the involvement of a figure like Ahmet Davutoğlu, who places special emphasis on the Middle East region, in Turkish foreign policy brought about significant alterations in Turkey's approaches toward the region. Davutoğlu, highlighting Turkey's historical, religious, and cultural bonds with the region, argued that Turkey cannot afford to remain indifferent or apathetic to the developments in the region owing to these connections. Moreover, he advocated for the region to be embraced as part of Turkey's Ottoman heritage, considering it one of the foremost issues in Turkish foreign policy.

#### "Davutoğlu and the Middle East Vision"

Since the Justice and Development Party assumed power in November 2002, there has been a notable alteration in the character and trends of Turkish foreign policy both regionally and globally. The Middle East has become a focal point for Turkish policymakers [Barkey,2011:125].

Under Davutoğlu's leadership, Turkey has moved beyond its exclusive focus on the West and instead seeks to develop policies that will influence not only the broader world but particularly the neighboring Middle East region, acknowledging the necessity of engagement in this area [Sinkaya,2011:93].

Soft power, which Davutoğlu defines as a more cost-effective and quicker-yielding political tool compared to military and economic power, has

emerged as a key aspect of his political arguments [Köseoğlu,2011:31]. With a structure that conforms well to European norms and a predominantly Muslim population, Turkey's image serves as another crucial factor in its soft power initiatives in the Middle East [Kanaş,2014].

Davutoğlu's consecutive terms as foreign minister (2009–2014) followed by prime minister (2014–2016) were marked by a progressively assertive foreign policy and a pan-Islamist perspective [Özkan,2014]. During this period, Turkey significantly intensified its regional endeavors, embraced a "zero problems with neighbors" approach, and enhanced its trade relations with neighboring countries [Aras,2005].

Propelled by appeals to both nationalist and religious sentiments within the electorate, exemplified by President Erdoğan's confrontation with Israeli President Shimon Peres in Davos and the national outcry following the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010, where Israeli commandos killed nine Turkish activists aboard a state-owned aid ship bound for Gaza, Turkey began to assert itself more vigorously as an active and independent regional power in the Middle East.

Turkey played an active role in addressing regional disputes, serving as a mediator between Syria and Iraq, and also between Syria and Israel. Turkey initiated development aid programs and ranked as the third-largest donor in 2013, trailing only the United States and Great Britain [Gilley,2015:38].

Davutoğlu's implementation of the "zero problems with neighbors" policy during the AK Party's rule has been influential in shaping Turkey's approach to the Middle East. However, this policy has faced scrutiny for its perceived impracticality given Turkey's complex relationships with its neighbors. In response to such criticism, Davutoğlu has positioned the policy as a continuation of Atatürk's principle of "Peace at Home, Peace in the World," emphasizing its feasibility and practicality rather than mere idealism [Gökçay, 2012:97-98].

Ahmet Davutoğlu implemented a proactive and efficient foreign policy strategy, focusing on two main approaches: the strategic depth policy and the

policy of problem mitigation. These strategies were formulated based on his political theories, which aimed to explore the core principles of foreign policy theory. The strategic depth theory and the neo-Ottoman theory stand out as the most prominent among these theories [İnaç&Hadji,2022:310].

Strategic Depth Theory originates from a geographic perspective that aims to overcome the perceived alienation of Turkey's neighboring countries. In his renowned work "Strategic Depth," Ahmet Davutoğlu advocates for Turkey to maintain equal distance from all countries and actors, avoiding entanglements in regional alliances or blocs to maintain neutrality and alleviate concerns of regional and international stakeholders about Turkish policies [Davutoğlu, 2014:54].

Neo-Ottomanism represents a vision aimed at revitalizing Turkey, with its origins tracing back to the era of the late Turkish President Turgut Özal in the 1980s, when it garnered support from various segments of Turkish society and politics. Davutoğlu highlighted the realization that history cannot be escaped, just as geography cannot be changed [Ganem, 2009:17].

As of early 2015, the coup in Egypt and the internationalization of the conflict in Syria presented insurmountable obstacles for the AKP government to pursue its dominant aspirations in the Middle East or uphold a coherent regional strategy. Additionally, these developments posed risks to the country's alignment with the US. Furthermore, the evident Islamic leaning of the government in both domestic and foreign affairs served as a catalyst for anti-government dissent, particularly exemplified by the Gezi protests of 2013 [Balta, 2018:17].

Davutoğlu's perspectives regarding the Middle East appear to have been shaped by the geopolitical concepts of Alfred T. Mahan, who underscored the strategic significance of "chokepoints" (narrow waterways) in attaining naval supremacy globally. Throughout various sections of his work "Strategic Depth," Davutoğlu highlights the geopolitical relevance of these chokepoints, many of which he believes are situated within the territories of predominantly Muslim nations.

Davutoğlu's views on the Middle East can be characterized by several key geopolitical aspects. He frequently underscores the discrepancy between current political boundaries and the geopolitical dy-

namics of the region. For example, he criticizes the way borders were established in the Middle East, likening them to poorly constructed walls due to their simplistic delineation by British and French authorities in the early twentieth century. However, he adopts a more traditional geopolitical perspective when he describes the Middle East as an "inescapable hinterland" or an area of influence for Turkey. This suggests that his critique of the region's borders primarily stems from its abrupt separation from the Ottoman Empire, rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the border-drawing process by Western powers [Erşen, 2014:92].

In 2016, Davutoğlu stepped down from his roles as the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and as Turkey's Prime Minister. His resignation was triggered by internal disputes and conflicting viewpoints within the party. Criticism was directed towards Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach, especially regarding the zero problems policy with neighboring countries and his vision for the Middle East. This departure resulted in shifts in Turkey's foreign policy direction and signaled the onset of a new political phase.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Davutoğlu's leadership and his policies regarding the Middle East have had significant ramifications both regionally and globally. The 'zero problems with neighbors' policy reflected Turkey's efforts to promote regional stability and cooperation, albeit facing challenges in implementation over time, yielding unexpected outcomes. Concepts such as strategic depth and neo-Ottomanism provided a vision for Turkey's aspirations to become a regional power, aiming to enhance its influence in the Middle East.

However, following the end of Davutoğlu's tenure, Turkey's Middle East policy underwent changes. Under new leadership, Turkey's regional strategies were reshaped, and a different approach was embraced. Nonetheless, the ideas and strategies underlying Davutoğlu's Middle East policies continue to exert a significant influence.

In summary, Davutoğlu's Middle East policy reflects Turkey's efforts to intervene in regional dynamics and strengthen its role in the Middle East. However, the challenges in implementing these policies and the changing regional conditions underscore the comp-

lexity and uncertainty of Turkey's future role in the Middle East. The evolution of Turkey's Middle East policies and its impact on the region are crucial issues to be carefully monitored in the future.

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### Çiçək Nəsirli

#### Xəzər Universiteti, magistrant AKP dönəmində Türkiyənin Orta Şərq siyasətində Davudoğlunun rolu XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalədə, Əhməd Davudoğlunun xarici siyasət strategiyasının Orta Şərqdəki təsirini müzakirə etdik. Əhməd Davudoğlu, Türkiyənin xarici siyasətinə idealist bir perspektivlə yanaşmışdır. O, Türkiyənin gücünə, tarixi varlığına, geostrateji mövqeyinə və sair xüsusiyyətlərinə inanaraq bir sıra prinsiplər və konseptlər inkişaf etdirərək bunları xarici siyasətdə tətbiq etməyə çalışmışdır. Davudoğlu dövrü xarici siyasətdə xüsusilə "yumşaq güc" prinsipi çox hiss olunmuşdur.

Davudoğlu, "Strateji Dərinlik" konsepti əsasında Türkiyənin xarici siyasətinin müəyyənləşdirilməsində əhəmiyyətli bir rol oynamışdır. Onun vizyosunda, Türkiyənin coğrafi və mədəni bağlantıları, bölgədə liderlik rolunu oynamasına və təsirinin artmasına imkan verir. "Qonşularla Sıfır Problem" siyasəti, Türkiyənin ətrafındakı ölkələrlə münasibətlərini gücləndirməyə çalışan bir strategiya olaraq tanınır. Bununla birlikdə, qonşu ölkələrlə yaşanan gərginliklərə diqqət çəkərək bu siyasətin praktikada necə işlədiyi müzakirə mövzusu olmuşdur.

Davudoğlunun "Neo-Osmanlıçılıq" vizyonu, Osmanlı İmperiyasının ənənələrini yenidən canlandırmağa çalışan bir siyasət çərçivəsində müzakirə olunur. Bu, Türkiyənin bölgədəki nüfuzunu artırmağa və təsir sahəsini genişlətməyə yönəlmişdir. Lakin bu vizyonun praktikada gərginliklərə səbəb olduğu və bəzi tənqidçilərin "neo-imperializm" adlandırdığı bir durum yaratdığı qeyd edilir.

Davudoğlu dövründə yaşanan "Ərəb Baharı" hadisələrində demokratik hərəkatları dəstəkləmiş və özünü bir aktor kimi ön plana çıxarmışdır. Tür-

kiyə, Orta Şərq ölkələri ilə yaxşı münasibətlər qurarkən, İsrail və Amerika Birləşmiş Ştatları ilə münasibətləri pisləşmişdir. Rusiya ilə münasibətləri isə 2015-ci ildə gərginləşsə də, regional maraqlar əsas plana çıxdığında, R.T. Ərdoğan tərəfindən gərginliyi azaltma çağırışları edilmişdir.

**Açar sözlər:** *Strateji dərinlik, qonşularla sıfır problem, neo-ottomanizm*

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**В период правления АКП роль Давутоглу во внешней политике Турции по отношению к Ближнему Востоку**  
**РЕЗЮМЕ**

В этой статье мы обсуждаем влияние внешней политики стратегии Ахмеда Давутоглу на Ближний Восток. Ахмед Давутоглу подходит к внешней политике Турции с идеалистической перспективой. Он развивает ряд принципов и концепций, веря в силу, историческое наследие, геостратегическое положение и другие характеристики Турции, и старается применять их на практике во внешней политике. Эпоха Давутоглу особенно отличается принципом "мягкой силы" во внешней политике.

Давутоглу сыграл значительную роль в определении внешней политики Турции на основе концепции "Стратегическая Глубина". По его мнению, географические и культурные связи Турции позволяют ей играть лидирующую роль в регионе и увеличивать свое влияние. Политика "Нулевых Проблем с Соседями" признана стратегией, направленной на укрепление отношений Турции с соседними странами. Однако, обсуждается, как эта политика работает на практике, особенно с учетом напряженных отношений с некоторыми соседними странами. Ракурс видения Давутоглу о "Нео-османизме" обсуждается как политика, направленная на восстановление традиций Османской империи с целью увеличения влияния Турции в регионе. Тем не менее, отмечается, что эта визия сталкивается с некоторыми критиками, которые называют это "неоимпериализмом" и утверждают, что она привела к напряженным ситуациям на практике.

В эпоху Давутоглу Турция поддерживала

демократические движения во время событий "Арабской Весны" и активно выступала как ключевой игрок. В то время как Турция развивала хорошие отношения с странами Ближнего Востока, отношения с Израилем и США ухудшились. В отношениях с Россией возникли напряженные моменты в 2015 году, однако, когда на передний план вышли региональные интересы и политика, президентом Эрдоганом были сделаны призывы к снижению напряженности.

**Ключевые слова:** *Стратегическая глубина, ноль проблем с соседями, нео-османизм.*