Pax Ottomanica No More! The "Peace" Discourse in Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Davutoğlu Era and the Prolonged Syrian Crisis

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Abstract

Turkey's eight years between 2008 and 2016 has been dominated by Ahmet Davutoğlu's vision of foreign policy, which was derived from his multi-edition book *Strategic Depth* (2000). In order to be able to present itself in its larger periphery as a pro-active, trustworthy actor, Davutoğlu argued, Turkey needed to change the foreign-policy paradigms with which it was stranded. As the Strategic Depth vision unfolded, it drew explicit parallels between modern Turkey and the Ottoman neighborhood policy. Turkey-Syria relations since 2008 had been providing the seekers of neo-Ottomanist tendencies in the contemporary Turkish foreign policy with abundant examples, because Syria, once an Ottoman territory and always a challenge to modern Turkey, came to be the first poster country in the shift towards Turkey's imperial awakening. In the post-Davutoğlu era, however, the rhetoric and practices of the past eight years seemed suddenly to disappear from the use of the Turkish agents of foreign policy; the new code of terms and actions to replace the Strategic Depth version is yet to be decided. This study seeks to pin down the neo-imperialist character of Turkey's foreign-policy discourse of the aforementioned eight years and contribute to discussions of the Turkish aspiration of neo-Ottomanism with focus on the Syrian crisis through the Justice and Development Party's re-invented peace discourse. In doing so, it aims to find out and elaborate on the current tendencies of Turkish foreign policy, which are no longer as explicit and articulated as they were during Davutoğlu's ministry and prime ministry. As Turkey's cross-border operation to Syria — the Euphrates Shield — ends and another one in Idlib begins, a discursive analysis stretching from Davutoglu's diplomatic "zero problems" with Damascus to the military use of ground troops and air force is timely. Such an endeavor would be essential in understanding the spectacular swing from one edge to the other in Turkey's inclination over a *phantasmagorical* empire.

> Look back over the past, with its changing empires that rose and fell and you can foresee the future too. Its pattern will be the same, down to the last detail; for it cannot break step with the steady march of creation. To view

the lives of men for forty years or forty thousand is therefore all one; for what more will there be for you to see? (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 7:49)

Introduction: The Neo-Ottoman "Peace" Discourse in the Turkish Foreign Policy

After years of obvious swings from Ankara's attempts to re-integrate Damascus to the international system of military operations of the Euphrates Shield and Idlib, on August 20, 2016 Turkey's Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım finally announced Turkey's final Syria policy as a settlement between all actors involved in the crisis, including the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (İdiz, 2016). The shooting down of a Russian fighter plane along the Syrian border in November 2015 by the Turkish army, and Russia's subsequent declaration of a no-fly zone in northern Syria were definitely the most hazardous moments of that decade. Such a conflict bordering on war with Russia could not have been foreseen, as the new Turkish foreign policy of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) had been praised by its global and domestic audience for brewing "a sense of grandeur and self-confidence" (Taşpınar, 2008) in Turkey for the first time since its foundation. Syria was a pilot case for the neo-Ottomanist shift from Turkey's traditional foreign policy. The JDP government's success in resolving the Syrian question would have justified its claims for bringing an Ottoman-like peace back to the Middle East and proved its capabilities as the pivotal actor with a perfect combination of hard and soft powers. Nevertheless, Ankara's 10 year fixation with Syria has resulted in the outcome opposite of what was planned. On August 17, 2016 Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş, assessing Turkey's current problems, confessed that "[m]uch of what has befallen us is the result of the situation in Syria and our Syria policy" (İdiz, 2016).

Pax Ottomanica is a term designed almost concurrently with, and in the same meaning as Richard Falk's use of Pax Americana in 1993 (Falk, 1993). As a way of remembering a glorious past, it initially aimed to refer to the possibility of extending "Turkey's renewed influence on the former imperial territories" and restoring an Ottoman-like "multiculturalism within the border of Turkey" in the post-Cold War atmosphere (Furlanetto, 2015:176). Since remembering is a cognitive action that takes place in the present, in the course of this activity, the past is "continuously modified and re-described" to the extent of imagining a new future carved out of those modifications (Quoted in Furlanetto:vii). The future, therefore, appears as the constant remaking of the past to fit in the expectations and yearnings of the present. Within the context of empire, the same applies for imperial nostalgia. Missing and remembering an imperial past through a high-politics discourse diffused across the public sphere, however, may result in the modification of the past and the creation of a hyper-reality distorting the truth, especially about the glory of those days. It is very likely to "hold the subject — the individual or the collective subject, a postcolonial

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party — captive in a magic mirror, maze of the past, obstructing political maturation and agency" (Buchenan and Richter, 2015:xix). Pax Ottomanica, in this sense, has held many minds captive in Turkey, not only in the 1990s, but during the JDP rule, especially following the Arab Spring. Consequent to the sudden fall of the dictatorial regimes in the Arabian countries, which were once Ottoman territories, a nostalgia reconnecting with the Ottoman past has been evoked once again and enhanced from 2011 onwards in the Turkish high political discourse.

Neo-Ottomanism and its vision of peace are an illusion gaining prominence in the 2010s among the political generation as "a model for the identity and political unity questions of the present" (Çolak, 2006:589). In a historical sense, it does not necessarily establish infallible links with the past, nor does it seek to do so. Adopting an ahistorical approach to the past, which slips away towards anachronism, the neo-Ottomanist mindset invests in a hyper-real interpretation of the cosmopolitan multiculturalism and peace-bringing *ethos* of the Ottoman Empire. Such hyper-reality has enabled the neo-Ottomanist nation to take comfort in a re-designed superiority and pride about their imaginary past to the extent of hoping for its reconstruction in the near future. Nevertheless, as the opposition between reality and hyper-reality becomes frictionally apparent within the context of Turkey's Syria policy, the Turkish promise of a decade to revive an Ottoman-like peace in the zones of conflict of the Middle East has evaporated together with the discursive traces of Ahmet Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth. The void left from Turkey's Middle East policy in the Davutoğlu-era is yet to be filled.

This study seeks to pin down the neo-imperialist character of Turkey's foreign-policy discourse of many 10 years and contributes to discussions of the Turkish aspiration for Pax Ottomanica, with a focus on the Syrian crisis by extending the scope of the analysis over the post-Davutoğlu era. A neo-Ottomanist success in foreign policy would have finally justified the ontological struggle of the JDP, which continues despite landslide election wins, and would have eventually proven their worth as "peace-bringing" descendants of the Ottoman Empire. That was the main reason why the Strategic Depth vision insisted on Turkey's dominant involvement in the affairs of a neighboring state. As Turkey's role in the Syrian conflict evolves from peace-building mediation to cross-border operations, an analysis stretching from diplomatic "zero problems" with Damascus to military use of ground troops and air force must be provided to understand the spectacular swing from one edge to the other, from hyper-reality to reality. In this article, therefore, I intend to provide a 10 year's overview of Turkey's Syria policy with emphasis on the neo-Ottomanist references to peace in Turkish high politics as well as Turkey's phantasmagorical dream of an empire. In doing so, I will also seek to delve further into the uncertainty of Turkish foreign policy in the post-Davutoğlu era and determine Turkey's "newer" discourse of peace.

Pax Ottomanica

The term *Pax Ottomanica* first came to be used in Turkey in the early 1990s as the sweet reminiscence of the stability and peace that had reigned over the multicontinental territories of the Ottoman Empire, with particular references to Mehmet II the Conqueror, Süleyman the Lawmaker, and Abdülhamid II. The geopolitical conjuncture molded by the dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the Gulf War created a suitable environment for such memory refreshment and nostalgia. Pax Ottomanica referred to the Ottoman state's providing peace, a legal system, commerce, and welfare for the neighboring peoples under its rule and to the prospect that contemporary Turkey could step in to assume a role similar to its predecessor (Akgündüz and Öztürk, 2011:431). Turgut Özal's presidency between 1989 and 1993, which coincided with the end of the Cold War era, kindled ardent desires that Turkey could pursue a neo-Ottomanist agenda, as the new world order in the making would seem to allow it. During the Gulf War in 1990, Özal predicted that Turkey could benefit from the change of borders in the Middle East and build on its historical and geographical legacy. His insistence on a possible recapture of Mosul and Kirkuk, however, resulted in the resignation of the Chief of the General Staff, together with the Ministers of National Defence and Foreign Affairs claiming such a move would defy modern Turkey's founding principles of non-expansion and non-interference (Özkan, 2016). With a retrospective approach, Özal has come to be praised by contemporary Neo-Ottomanists as "Turkey's first leader to bring provincial (religio-conservative) sensibilities to the centre of the establishment" (Yavuz, 2016:452).

In fact, the resurgence of Pax Ottomanica in Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s coincided with, or rather was superseded by, the re-emphasis on Pax Americana in U.S. foreign policy, particularly to Iraq. The Gulf War was the context in which Richard Falk redefined world politics and the U.S.'s leading role in it (Falk, 1993:145). With a newly found emphasis on the founding myths and legends such as the melting pot, City upon a Hill and the Manifest Destiny, the neo-conservative approach to Pax Americana, came into being as the justification of the American interference with Iraqi affairs (Dorrien, 2004). Neo-Ottomanism of the 1990s was very much inspired by this politically nostalgic mindset and sought to revisit its own imperial past in the face of the possibility of changing the borders in the Middle East. Nevertheless, since Pax Ottomanica and neo-Ottomanism both denote a sort of expansionism and a break from Turkey's balance and stability-oriented, non-adventurist republican foreign-policy, they didn't gain currency until 2008. In the meantime, the U.S. had to face the fact that "a transnational clash of ethnicities turbocharged by religious narratives is vastly harder to navigate, let alone manipulate" (Simmon & Stevenson, 2015); and its Iraq policy, especially after the occupation in 2003, proved that all romanticized yearnings for greatness must end. As Campbell Craig (2008) rightly put it, "[t]he case against Pax Americana…can be boiled down to one word: Iraq." And for Pax Ottomanica, that word is Syria.

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The JDP's initial scheme of getting involved further in Middle East politics as a playmaker in the way of lifting visa restrictions, establishing a free trade area, and re-connecting with the territories that had once been part of the Ottoman world order (*Nizam-ül Alem*) socially, culturally, and politically led to a revival of the Pax Ottomanica dream. Turkey's years between 2008 and 2016 were dominated by Ahmet Davutoğlu's vision of foreign policy, which was derived from his multi-edition book *Strategic Depth* (2000, 32nd ed.). According to the Strategic Depth doctrine, in the post-Cold War framework of the international system, Turkey had become a one-dimensional, rigid, unexciting and reactive actor who ignored the multitudes of richness and resources offered by its Ottoman geopolitical legacy. In order to be able to report itself to its larger periphery as a pro-active, trustworthy and great actor, Davutoğlu submits, Turkey needed to change the foreign-policy paradigms with which it was stranded. Within this new neo-Ottomanist tone, becoming "an order-building actor" emerged as "one of the methodological macro-level objectives of foreign policy" (Yeşiltaş & Balcı, 2012:15).

In order to have a better idea of how much the notion of Pax Ottomanica as a universal peace project resonates in the JDP's foreign policy, one needs to be aware of Davutoğlu's earlier work *Civilizational Transformation and the Muslim World* (1993). As established in this publication, the Ottoman system of governing a multitude of Muslim and non-Muslim peoples under the name *millet* proves that the Ottoman understanding of world order was never inferior to the Westphalian one. In fact, it offered "an alternative imagination" of how peace could be achieved, maintained, and spread (p. 46). Davutoğlu's claim that "Islamic civilization was the only civilization which had a superior past over western civilization" justifies for him the authority of this Islamic alternative, both in the past and the future (p. 103). Throughout the realm of Islam (*Dar-ül İslam*), the geography of Pax Ottomanica, Islamic law was implemented as the guarantor of "inter-communal and inter-state" peace (pp. 109, 46). Nevertheless, at present the nation-state system formed within the Westphalian framework excludes any alternatives and does not allow the re-emergence of this distinct understanding of world order (p. 109).

Davutoğlu, therefore, considers Pax Ottomanica a plausible but underrated alternative to the Westphalian nation-structure, but he does not question its viability for contemporary stability and welfare, as well as its desirability by the receiving end beyond Turkey's borders. According to this viewpoint, the impasse into which the inherent shortcomings of the nation-state have driven the international community could be surpassed, especially by the Muslim nations, through the revitalization of the "traditional concepts such as the *Ummah* universal brotherhood, *Dar-ül İslam* as a world order and the Caliphate as the political institutionalization of this world order" (Davutoğlu, 1993:113). Of course, by revitalization, he does not mean restoring the institutions of the Ottoman Empire exactly as they were in the times of Mehmet II, the Conqueror, or Süleyman the Lawmaker. Nevertheless, he proposes and encourages

"an attempt to develop an alternative world order" (p. 113) grounded in the updated versions of those institutions embedded in an Islamic legal framework. Among them, the Caliphate, through which the Ottoman state asserted "a transcendent authority" (Casale, 2010:7) both on land and sea after 1517, is of utmost importance.

In Davutoğlu's (1993:105) notion of Pax Ottomanica, the Caliphate above all had served as the fountainhead of peace and stability in the territories under the Ottoman rule and become "the symbol for an alternative world order." It had also stood as an anti-colonial force in the Middle East, particularly during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), given his struggle against the Great Powers of the European balance of power in the nineteenth century. The political, economic, and socio-cultural integration throughout the realm of Islam under the Ottoman peace had been knitted so tightly, skillfully and fruitfully that colonialism had failed to offer anything better. However, as Davutoğlu's reading of history goes, it fell victim to extreme westernization subsequent to the founding of modern Turkey in 1924, and therefore it was abolished. On this account, the end of Pax Ottomanica came with the transformation of the Ottoman Empire to a Westphalian nation-state in which no alternative to the dominant western perception of world order could prevail (pp. 106, 107).

Interestingly enough, as he became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2009, and after the outcomes of the Arab Spring appeared more clearly, Davutoğlu shifted his own marking the end of Pax Ottomanica from the abolition of the Caliphate to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. In this respect, he joined the increasing number of the critiques of the legacy of Sykes-Picot in the Middle East. The Arab Spring indeed has played a considerable role in the revitalization of Davutoğlu's (1993:111) dream of new borders in the Middle East and restoring the authentic Ottoman past by erasing the Sykes-Picot moment. For him, the "civilizational vivacity" of the Muslim world finally burst forth with the Arab peoples' rising against their authoritarian governments. The new system to replace the 1916 structure in the Middle East under the leadership of Turkey might accordingly sustain the resurfacing of Pax Ottomanica. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring, and particularly the Syrian crisis, has not turned out the way Turkey anticipated; none of the peoples' movements, with the exception of Tunisia, has reached any substantial stability of democracy, nor has Ankara demonstrated any substantial capacity of assuming a pivotal role in Middle East peace. Turkey has, instead, developed an extremely pro-Sunni, neo-Ottomanist, discourse, and has, thus, replaced the traditional non-interventionist Turkish foreign policy which is "peace at home, peace in the world."

It should here also be underlined that, although within the neo-Ottoman approach to peace, the revival of the Caliphate has an elusive place, the leadership that Turkey has sought to assume at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) throughout the last decade much resembles a Caliph-like authority. In 2005, the OIC went through a substantial reform with Turkey's initiatives bringing new requirements such

as that the Secretary General be chosen by election every 10 years. Following the intense campaigning of Ankara, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu became the first elected Secretary General of the OIC and sought to further those reforms in parallel with the *Strategic Depth* vision, especially in the domain of peace and conflict resolution. In a book he wrote upon his election, İhsanoğlu (2010:100–101) insinuated that his office, provided with "greater flexibility and authority," could now assume "the responsibility of coordinating the implementation of policies which in some instances lies outside the realm of the membership." In this respect, he proposed a capacity-building framework in which "a fast-track mechanism" (p. 99) of coordination could be developed for conflict resolution and peace bringing — both among and outside the OIC membership. Nevertheless, once his proposal also suggested the foundation of an Islamic Court of Justice for the Resolution of Conflicts among Islamic countries, for the first time in its 35-year history, the OIC came to resemble the Caliphate. The internationalism aspect of the neo-Ottomanist foreign policy was, thus, partially built on reforming the OIC to transform it into an Islamic institution of peace. The scheme, however, not only failed to attract the members' enthusiasm, but provoked the far right's Islamophobic discourse in Europe (Bodissey, 2008).

Neo-Ottoman Reading of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy

The 2002 election victory of the JDP launched a new political process in which Turkey's institutions, political elite, policymaking procedures, and the state *ethos* underwent a significant change. In terms of foreign policy, first the long-time advisor to the government, then Minister of Foreign Affairs and eventually Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu guided this transformation for almost a decade by enhancing a memory of the Ottoman sphere of influence through his best-selling book *Strategic Depth: Turkey's Place in the World* (2000). The ideal of Pax Ottomanica has thus been rediscovered in the way to become more popular than it was in the 1990s. The first context in which the JDP government wanted this ideal to resonate was with Syria. Nevertheless, after 10 years since Turkish and Syrian relations were first rekindled in 2008, the target of the JDP's peace discourse has today shifted towards Africa. Turkey's Syrian policy, on the other hand, remains in ruins with further possibilities of cross-border military operations on the horizon.

Strategic Depth (2000) asserted that the Turkish Republic's persistent foreign-policy priority of allying with the U.S. and Western Europe had rendered Turkey one-sided, under-capacity, and less exciting. A reconnection with the rest of the world would have overhauled Turkey's capabilities as a regional and global actor. This strategy is based on the principles of aiming zero-problems with neighbors, providing them with both freedom and security, utilizing soft power, pursuing multi-dimensional policies of political and economic integration and conducting rhythmic diplomacy. Once Turkey embraced its larger neighborhood, its ties with the U.S. and EU would be automatically

tightened further. If Turkey could rekindle relations with Syria, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, and other Middle Eastern countries — former provinces of the Ottoman Empire — it would be in compliance with the vision offered by *Strategic Depth* (Davutoğlu, 2000). The moment that the JDP government pointed the Middle East as its requisite geography of interest, co-operation and action, this new Turkish foreign policy was inevitably colored by implications of an Ottomanist revival. The rise of neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign policy was no doubt accelerated by the insincere, erratic, and at times insulting attitude of the European Union towards Turkey's membership (Yavuz, 1998:22).

The *Strategic Depth* vision was welcomed by foreign affairs analysts on the grounds of its being an inspirational, groundbreaking, and history-changing perspective. Fuller (2008:169), for instance, praised it as "the most systematic, substantial and comprehensive vision of Turkey's strategic position yet written." Davutoğlu (2000:34–36) offered an alternative reading of history, geopolitics, globalization and international politics by positioning Turkey in the middle of global affairs as a possible pivotal state rather than a wing country of the Cold War. Noticing the changing dynamics of its geography, therefore, Turkey could overcome the dullness of its secure, but one-dimensional, Western-oriented and reactive existence in the international system. Davutoğlu called for a decisive and resilient political will combined with strategic mindset to restore Turkey back to the neighboring regions and beyond as a global actor. Such political will would also have freed the Turkish public opinion from the recent republican past and the mostly unjustified threat perceptions of the Sevres Treaty, as well as guide Turkey through the turbulent globalization storms. According to Davutoğlu, what Turkey needed for greatness was the persistent will and vision to match its "historic depth" with its "geographic depth" (Danforth, 2008:90).

The transformation of Turkish foreign policy from the security-seeking priorities to influence-seeking and expansion-seeking priorities encompasses the great debate over the universalism-particularism dichotomy. Within this framework, Turkey's decades-old Kemalist conduct of foreign affairs, which could be defined as non-irredentist, non-interventionist, secularist, and nationalist, represented, in the eyes of Strategic Depth advocates, mere particularism, because those tenets made Turkey irrelevant as an actor in the geography of mostly Muslim countries. A revival of Pax Ottomanica, on the other hand, with its promise of universal order, Islamic values, cosmopolitanism and the Caliph's legacy suggests a better chance for the Turkish government to connect with the peoples of the neighboring states, especially in the Middle East (Fisher Onar, 2009:230). Therefore, if Turkey puts forward an updated image of its Ottoman past and complies with the Ottomanist mission of spreading order, it would act according to the dynamic requirements of a changing international system. Kemalist particularism may have been fit for the Cold War's balance of power, but today's conditions could be better handled by Ottoman universalism.

In Davutoğlu's world vision, Turkey was a pivotal state, capable of affecting the course of affairs in its neighborhood and beyond. Maximization of its capabilities would provide Turkey with the opportunity to foster regional peace as well as to help the international society create a new world order. In his speech titled "Visionary Diplomacy: Global and Regional Order from Turkey's Perspective," delivered at the Third Ambassadors' Conference in Ankara, Davutoğlu conveyed the message that with a new emphasis on "moral and ethical concerns" Turkey would partake "in the remaking of the global order" (Kardaş, 2011). Turkey's past experience with Pax Ottomanica and new vision of world order would bring a fuller meaning to its memberships in international organizations. Within the context of NATO, for instance, Davutoğlu set a reformed task-definition for the members "to move beyond crisis management to the setting of a new international order based on cooperative security combined with soft power instruments" (Interview: Cool under pressure…, 2012). His real ambitions with regards to internationalism, however, rested mainly on the United Nations (UN) and the possibility of taking a leading part in its reform. Convinced that the UN's current structure representing Cold War dynamics withheld the implementation of the Strategic Depth vision, Davutoğlu in a way volunteered to offer his world-order plans for a comprehensive reform, or even better, for "a new international order" (Turkish FM warns…, 2012). The Ottoman-Islamic heritage appears to be the main ingredient in these plans to make the world order more complete, innovative, and multicultural. Nevertheless, despite such emphasis on internationalism throughout its Strategic Depth decade, Turkey succeeded in exerting influence only on the OIC, which did not last either because that influence was not fit for the organization's historical role and mission.

The reference to Ottoman multiculturalism and pluralism aims to create the simulacrum of a happy past shared by the entire Middle East. A carefully configured resonance of Islamic brotherhood, which did not exist in the Kemalist discourse of Turkish foreign policy, was considered instrumental in the creation of such perception. This attempt at "*repositioning* Turkey and *reconstructing* the political terrain by re-examining Turkish identity in accordance with the Ottoman-Islamic past" (Yavuz, 1998:34) has gradually given way to neo-Ottomanist convictions in external affairs. The era to be emulated most on this account was of course the reign of Abdülhamid II, because, except for the loss of Cyprus in 1878 and that of Egypt and Tunisia in 1881, Sultan Abdülhamid prevented the further shrinking of the fragile borders of the empire, restored the Ottoman influence among the Muslim people with a fresh emphasis on his title *Halife-i Müslimin* (Caliphate of Muslims), took an unprecedented interest in Africa, and at the same time claimed to be peers with the European great powers. In *Strategic Depth* (2000), Davutoğlu extends his generous praise of Abdülhamid and his foreign policy on the grounds that this pious sultan had aptly assessed the requisites of Ottoman geography. Davutoğlu's high opinion of Abdülhamid, however, is not likely to stem from "any objective reading of diplomatic history" (Reynolds, 2012). In truth,

Abdülhamid's reign was a 33-year period of decline in which the Ottoman Empire's drift towards the end was accelerated through the Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye*), desperate alliance-seeking, and territorial losses during peace.

While claiming a point of view, it is not uncommon for political theorists to resort to illusionism, the science of pseudo-miracles that creates a visual trickery representing a rather distorted version of reality. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* is the quintessential historical example of putting the phantasmagorical into political perspective. His experimentation with "dioptric anamorphosis," which is a lens or mirror that empowers an image out of its actual proportion and meaning, created the monumental image of Leviathan and prescribed one of the most famous theories in the history of political thought (Jiménez, 2015:188). When the graphic designers apply "dioptric anamorphosis," they construct a set of distorted drawings, which resemble, from an unusually close distance, an image familiar to our historical and social memory such as a face from history or a landscape. The "normal" perspective would, however, display some random, sporadic lines by no means resembling the image that the close-up perspective reveals. The principle of anamorphosis suggests that the slight shift of perspective could create an illusion giving the impression of a transition from chaos to order. Some success of political theorists and strategists owes much to their ability of creating political illusionism, preferably as powerful as dioptric anamorphosis. In the past decade, the JDP government provided Turkey with a skilful political illusionist in the person of Davutoğlu, who apparently mastered dioptric anamorphosis, and from the random, sporadic lines of rhythmic diplomacy, sought to unveil the vision of a mighty Turkey, pretending to restore a Hamidian influence in its requisite geography, which is the Middle East. Still, after a decade, chaotic ventures in Turkish foreign policy have failed to form an imperial order.

Turkey's Syria Policy and Failed Attempt at Peace

The Arab Spring was the first substantial crisis to test Turkey's new self-assumed leadership in the Middle East as a regional power. Turkey's changing attitude towards the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, swinging from friendship to military intervention, is especially significant within this context. Davutoğlu repeated on several occasions that the Syrian question was a "litmus test" (Davutoğlu says supporters of Syria…, 2012) for the credibility of the current international community and international organizations. As true a statement as that is, Turkey's dealings with Syria also served as a litmus paper for Davutoğlu's own vision and Turkey's new stance in the international system. The transformation in Turkey's traditional republican foreign policy most visibly started with Davutoğlu's picking Syria as the model country to prove the success of his "zero problems with neighbors" policy. As reflected in the Strategic Depth vision, Kemalist reading of Turkey's geopolitics and neighborly relations was no longer capable of solving any acute problems with neighbors, since

it had been a problem itself. Reading the Syria impasse and beyond, Davutoğlu presented his vision as a magical know-how of all Turkish foreign-policy issues. Once Turkey remembered that it shared a "common history, common destiny and common future" (Kılıç, 2009) with Syria and the rest of the region, there would have been no reason for problems to remain unsolved.

Syria was chosen as the "poster-child" of the changing Turkish foreign policy, because it made the best case to prove that animosity with neighboring countries was the fault of the Kemalist foreign policy, and that the revival of an Ottoman-like peace discourse would bring back the old friendship (Phillips, 2016:34). Turkey-Syria relations were at an impasse, especially because of Syria's undercover support of PKK, conflict over the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris, and, of course, the Hatay problem. In a much broader context, the diplomatic freeze between two neighbors was the result of Turkey's years of accumulated discontent with Syria over its facilitation of religious sectarianism, drug trafficking, smuggling, terrorism and espionage. Furthermore, because of its both overt and covered support of Hamas and Hezbollah, Syria had been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism, and isolated by the international community as well (Fletcher, 2008). The popularity of Davutoğlu's phrase "zero-problems with neighbors," therefore, owed much to Turkey's rekindling relations with Syria and its attempt to end Damascus's global isolation in 2009. The regional conjuncture suitable to the Davutoğlu vision came with the instability created by the catastrophic situation in Iraq after the US occupation and its detrimental effect on all claims of *Pax Americana* (Phillips, 2016:34). With the aim of filling in the power vacuum, the JDP government sought to create a new activism to maximize its capacity as a mediator in the Middle East and, on this account, it paid much attention to introducing the Syria-Israel meeting in 2008 to the international community as the dawn of a new era in the Middle East. Turkey's enthusiasm and capabilities for mediation, however, would fade away as Ankara gravitated almost exclusively on the Sunnis of the Middle East, evoking perceptions of the Caliphate (Danforth, 2016).

Davutoğlu's know-how for the solutions to the problems, which could not have been fixed by Kemalist approaches, prioritized maximum cooperation with the neighboring countries. To that end, for instance, the Turkish-Syrian High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council met in Aleppo, first on October 13, 2009, when 50 agreements were signed in just one week, and then on December 23, 2009 — this time at the ministerial level. According to the protocol signed, visa requirements were reciprocally lifted and cooperation in the areas of shipping, aviation, energy, transport, finance, tourism, education, communication, electricity, agriculture, health, industry and other sectors was established. Through these accords and previous steps of trade liberalization, a Turkey-Syria Free Trade Area was planned to be put in force within 12 years (Dimou, 2012). The expectation was to design this free trade area to eventually grow into a EU-like union in the Middle East (Sengupta, 2014).

When Turkey's opposition to the Assad regime in Syria on the grounds of human-rights violations became obvious in August 2011, the zero-problem policy crashed down. The process of multi-level, multi-track integration and cooperation with Damascus was frozen, together with the Syrian government's assets in Turkey, and thus, Davutoğlu's know-how suddenly proved insufficient and obsolete. On November 22, 2011, the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, for the first time called for the ousting of al-Assad publicly (Arsu, 2011). On October 30, 2012, Davutoğlu eliminated any possibility of dialog with Syria as "futile" (Turkey Rules Out Dialogue…, 2012). Within three years, from 2009 to 2012, Turkey's actorness in terms of restoring Syria into the international system was reversed from being a mediator to an intervening force. Al-Assad has accused Erdoğan of acting as "Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman" (Assad: Erdoğan thinks he is Caliph, 2012). At this point, once again, Russia offered to mediate to re-establish dialog between Turkey and Syria. While Erdoğan, again unprecedented in Turkey's republican foreign policy, claimed many times that "Syria is our domestic affairs" (Daloğlu, 2013), any concessions at the negotiation table remained unlikely.

When the dealings with Syria, the poster country of the "zero problems," failed to justify Turkey's new self-assumed role as a model country, Davutoğlu's emphasis in his foreign policy discourse has shifted to another principle, which was "balance between freedom and security." This principle, responding to the Arab Spring, suggests Turkey's equal responsibilities towards the Middle Eastern states' security and peoples' freedom at the same time. As a discursive proof of new Turkey's commitment to democracy and freedom in the Middle East, references to this concept by Davutoğlu were made to explain Ankara's support of the civil uprisings throughout 2011 (Yeşiltaş and Balcı, 2013:11). In an article written for *Foreign Policy* to introduce his priorities, Davutoğlu (2010) stated that "[t]he legitimacy of any political regime comes from its ability to provide security to its citizens and this security should not be at the expense of freedoms and human rights in the country." The inability to promote "zero problems" any longer after 2011 resulted in an enhanced emphasis on the freedom of the peoples of the Middle East. Erdoğan's popularity among the Arab nations, against this background, reached its peak in February 2011 at Tahrir Square in Egypt, when he became the first leader of a prominent state to side with the protestors and call Hosni Mubarak to step down. In a speech at the University of Chicago on May 24, 2012, Davutoğlu, praising Turkey's "healthy balance between freedoms and security" presented "the Turkish case" as a unique example of "assertive foreign policy with dignity" (Fang, 2012). Such discursive shift from "zero problems" to "balance between freedom and security" aimed to convey the message to the world that the new Turkish foreign policy was still infallible, and to emphasize its potential to bring peace to the region and its people. Such conviction inspired Davutoğlu to utter, "Turkey will be the owner, the pioneer and the spokesmen of the new Middle East that is being born" (Quoted in Sarı Ertem, 2017:130).

Despite Davutoğlu's (2012) claim of always being "principled" and value-based in their dealings with Syria, the opposition in Turkey has always found the JDP's Syrian policy over-ambitious, inconsistent, and dangerous, since it has brought Turkey to the brink of war many times. Calling the three-year process "from zero problems to zero solutions," (Kumbaracıbaşı, 2010), the opposition asked the Foreign Minister at the National Assembly on many occasions whether al-Assad had become a despot only recently, or if he had always been one; why Turkey picked Syria as the model country of its zero-problem policy in the first place; and even worse, why the Turkish Prime Minister and his family invited al-Assad and his family to join them in Bodrum for summer vacation (Uzgel, 2012). Metin Münir, a reputable Turkish journalist, considers Davutoğlu "an unmitigated disaster for Turkey." Because of the latter's obsession with recreating Ottoman peace and universality, as Münir maintained, Turkey's "possibly boring but solid, time-proven, effective and well-defined Middle East policy" was ruined (Münir, 2012). Turkey's republican motto, "peace at home, peace in the world," may not be as exciting as the neo-Ottomanist state depicted by the Strategic Depth vision, but, within the pragmatic limits drawn by this motto at the Lausanne Conference of 1923, Turkey had never in its modern history so ardently called for an intervention in any neighboring state's government. Davutoğlu's overt and exclusive support of the Sunni Syrian opposition, "those who work and fight against the [al-Assad] regime," (Davutoğlu says supporters of Syria should be isolated, 2012) was not a high-politics attitude common in the traditional republican foreign policy of Turkey.

The shift in Turkey's Syrian policy from "zero problems" to "balance between security and freedom" has not been understood much by the international community in the way it was presented. Davutoğlu's calls for "the creation of safe havens in Syria" (IISS, 2012:2) fell on deaf ears at the UN Security Council, because Turkey's insistence on a Sunni take-over of the Syrian government damaged its role as a mediator and a model country. The other international actors involved in the crisis, such as the U.S. and Russia, sought to establish an all-inclusive negotiation platform consisting of all the players in Syria, and from this perspective, because of its exclusive support to the opposition, Turkey — together with Qatar and Saudi Arabia — appears as a state that has "directed assistance into the wrong hands" (Tabler, 2013:97). In February 2012, Russia, together with China, vetoed the UN Security Council for the second time, as it included sanctions only against al-Assad and not the opposition. Turkey's one-sided partiality for Sunnis has resulted in its extended support to the Muslim Brotherhood, whereas seeking multi-sectarian candidates for "local and regional elected representatives" (p. 99) would have been the wiser and more neighborly option for Ankara to pursue. In their assessment of the end of Pax Americana, Simmon and Stevenson (2015) contend that the U.S. sank so deep in Iraq because of its failure to co-operate with "local partners with substantial bureaucratic cohesion or popular legitimacy." The same was true for Turkey and its aspirations for a Pax Ottomanica in Syria.

The Prospects for Peace in the Post-Davutoğlu Era

From 2008 to 2016, Turkey's new foreign policy was conducted overtly by Davutoğlu's vision of Strategic Depth and its slogans, "zero problems with neighbors" and "balance between security and freedom." The first resonated in Turkey's Syrian policy between 2008 and 2011 and the latter after the Arab uprisings in 2011. Nevertheless, when the Turkish forces shot down a Russian SU-24 fighter along the Syrian border for violating Turkish airspace, Turkish interference with Syria became even more problematic and chaotic. Turkey's decision in the region began to shift continuously from one group to another, leaving Ankara unable to determine any of its own moves pro-actively. Once again, Tukey sank to the role of a reactionary actor in the Middle East, and it lost track of the phantasmagorical empire drawn by Davutoğlu through a powerful language game of peace. A content analysis of Davutoğlu's speeches reveals that "history," "human," "Syria," "Islam," and "civilization" were the words used most throughout (Sari Ertem, 2017:136). Although turkey's Syria policy of the last decade intended to draw from the common past, religion and civilization on the discursive level, that language game was not commensurate with reality. Particularly in the years 2015 and 2016, the Syrian question caused an undeniable disenchantment with Davutoğlu's vision for new Turkish policy, both nationally and internationally. His "ambitious activism" thus became too ambitious for all actors involved in the crisis, including Turkey (Arkan & Kınacıoğlu, 2016).

If 2015 was the *annus horribilis*, 2016 was expected to be the *annus mirabilis* for Turkey's enhanced role in the Middle East following Davutoğlu's resignation under pressure from President Erdoğan and the Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey after the downing of the Russian warplane. Within the context of the Syrian crisis, Turkey has eventually been undressed from its traditional persona as a NATO member and estranged from the U.S. in the region because of American support of the Kurdish PYD/YPG. A quest for the prospect of closer co-operation with Russia and postembargo Iran as well as the launch of unilateral land operations from Afrin through Idlib indicate the change Turkey has been going through in the past couple of years in conducting its Syrian policy. Davutoğlu's vision of Strategic Depth has proved ineffective against this background and has declined from "Zero Problems" to "Precious Loneliness" (Balamir Coşkun, 2015). Nevertheless, after a decade of strict name-giving and Wittgenstein-like linguistic game-playing in foreign policy, Turkey has to endure free-falling in the Middle East subsequent to the stepping-down of Davutoğlu. From May 2016 to April 2017, there was no official declaration about how Turkish foreign policy would be directed in these extremely turbulent times.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, has finally unveiled the new blueprint of the post-Davutoğlu foreign policy in an article in April 2017. On the one hand, he guarantees that Turkey's "respect for international law, peaceful resolution of conflicts, active roles in international organizations and a focus on humanitarian diplomacy," which were also emphasized in Davutoğlu's vision, would continue

"as always" (Çavuşoğlu, 2017:13). On the other hand, Davutoğlu is no longer being mentioned, nor is his Strategic Depth being referred to. Phrases such as "a preventive solution policy for regional and global problems on the ground" (p. 15) may resemble the language that Davutoğlu created, but the exact phrases that reigned in his foreign policy discourse are apparently no longer in current use. In his attempt at reformulating a new narrative, Çavuşoğlu points to "the conflict in Syria" still as "[o]ur biggest challenge both regionally and at the international level" and Russia as a harmonious partner together which Turkey could manage the Syrian question to progress "in the right direction." Such are the first official expressions of the "newer" Turkish policy of Syria.

On the theoretical level, the recently adopted approach to define the post-Davutoğlu era seems to be the "moral realism." Since 2015, Davutoğlu's emphasis on "soft power, coupled with civilizational multilateralism" has lost ground within the framework of the Middle East, and Fuat Keyman (2017:56) calls this "the radical reset of Turkish foreign policy." According to this viewpoint, Davutoğlu's pro-activism was most suitable for the era between 2002 and 2010 — roughly between 9/11 and the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Then it was widely believed that he would be able to provide an Islamic contribution to the EU norms and values, which would be beneficial both for the East and the West. From 2011 to 2014, however, as the Arab Spring was transformed into the Arab uprisings, Davutoğlu's pro-active moralism focusing on the humanitarian and peace-bringing capacity of Turkish foreign policy could not respond to the challenges emerging in the Middle East. Throughout these five years, however, Turkey insisted on Davutoğlu's terminology and strategy without altering its position according to the altering situations. The "reset," which would render the persistence of Pax Ottomanica discourse impossible, was launched in 2015 and accelerated in 2016 due to the security risks caused by ISIS, PKK/PYD/YPG and the refugee influx (Keyman, 2017:55–59). As Turkey's trans-border military operations began, its capacity to bring peace to the turbulent areas of the region through multi-actor, multi-layer and multi-cultural co-operations evaporated too.

The "newer" Turkish foreign policy, whose main lines are still too blurred to be determined, functions through security concerns and contains hard power. Keyman (2017:65) says that the scant emphasis on humanitarianism that still remains within the contexts of Gaza, Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan, allows this approach to be qualified as "moral realism." Turkish foreign policy's claim to "take side with the people rather than the regime" (Sarı Ertem, 2017:115) in its neighborhood, with reference to Davutoğlu's principle of "balance between security and freedom" is preserved in this approach as justification for military intervention. In her assessment of Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr, Jannika Brostrom (2016) presents "moral realism" in foreign policy as an approach to taking morality "as a motivating force in rational decision-making." Against this background, "expectations of reciprocity," "rational choice," and "moral and material outcomes" appear as

its basic tenets. The states engaged in moral realism take actions with the expectation of gaining influence and maximizing interests in return for providing freedom, aid and protection to the states at which this policy is aimed. In that sense, the expected reciprocity is not "between nations of equal power," but "between strong states acting as patrons and weak states." Therefore, it always runs the risk of being associated with "clientalism, patrimonialism and even neo-imperialism" (p. 1634).

If Turkey's foreign policy in the post-Davutoğlu era is to be defined by moral realism, as Keyman suggests, there are requirements Turkey fails to meet. According to Brostrom (2016), what makes a foreign-policy action moral realist is its potential to make "moral and material outcomes" appear after its implementation. Expectations alone, in that sense, do not qualify a policy to become moral realist, unless concrete positive outcomes stem from them. And without "consistency and coherency" in foreign policy, such outcomes remain as failed expectations of miscalculations (p. 1636). Therefore, changing "zero-problems with neighbors" to "regaining friends" (Keyman, 2017:66) would not suffice to enhance Turkey's capacity to bring peace to the Middle East, as it would simply be another example of a Wittgenstein-like language game creating phantasmagoria. Judging by the scant and changing day-to-day information provided by the Turkish government on the current land operations through Syria, Turkey has not yet finalized the formulation of the newer version of its Middle East policy.

One of the reasons why Pax Americana ended in Iraq was that after the military operations, the U.S. lacked "a large cadre of deployable civilian experts in reconstruction and stabilization, deep knowledge of the society…and…a sustained military force to provide security for populations and infrastructure" (Simmon & Stevenson, 2015). All those were needed to finish what the military land operations started in Iraq in 2003 and in Libya in 2011; yet the U.S. failed both times to come up with what was required. As the Turkish military operation expands from Idlib to Afrin, Turkey would similarly be required to fulfill the same sort of tasks in order to contribute to the peace in the region. The success of a pro-active foreign policy with moral realist tendencies depends on good implementing capacity. Otherwise, the expected returns of a moral action will be diminished to the point where the cost surpasses the benefit. Given its recent macroeconomic indicators, military capacity and blurred alliance patterns shifting from the U.S. to Russia, Turkey is likely to outsource itself in Syria, just like the U.S. did in Iraq. In other words, if the dream of Pax Americana died in Iraq, the JDP's aspirations to recreate Pax Ottomanica in the Middle East is also doomed to fail as evidenced by the complications in Syria. The dioptric anamorphosis showing the Ottoman Empire through its lenses for the last 15 years has lost its phantasmagorical power and reflects the current situation as it is. Justifying military operations with the promise of peace-bringing is, in fact, the historically-taught way of the "old amoral realism as the quasi-moral imperialism" (Thornton, 2005:43), which we have seen recurrently after 9/11.

Akça ATAÇ

Conclusion: A Universal Solution for Peace in the Middle East?

The Lausanne Treaty of 1923, the founding treaty for modern Turkey, aimed to serve as a genesis to move away from the discontent of the unresolved issues of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Middle East, by stressing a strict non-interventionism. Erdoğan's criticism of it "for leaving the country too small" (Danforth, 2016) in that sense is perceived as alarming, not only by the neighboring states, but also in the West, which has come to be re-associated with "the Cross" (Dearden, 2017) in the JDP's recent foreign policy discourse. This revival of the grand narrative, "the Cross vs. the Crescent," was last echoed during the second Siege of Vienna in 1683. The first reference to Vienna during the JDP government was made in the then Chief EU Negotiator Egemen Bağış's speech upon the election of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly at the Council of Europe in 2010. His words "[Çavuşoğlu] is the first President of the Parliamentary Assembly born east of Vienna" ("Davutoğlu says PACE President…," 2010) signify the beginning of the usage of analogies from the Ottoman history in Turkish high political discourse. Because "concepts are constitutive of political positions" (Jordheim & Neuman, 2011:154), the usage of certain concepts instead of others is always political. Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign policy has most forcibly begun first as a language game constructed by Davutoğlu.

Davutoğlu offered his neo-Ottomanist viewpoint of a "world order to emerge" as universal, which means fit to bring permanent peace and reform the existing international organizations in their full capacity. His constant attempt to name new missions for Turkey and re-read geography, history, and geopolitics, are part of the same claim for universality. Through a new vocabulary, Davutoğlu sought to create a new reality for Turkey, its neighbors, and, in fact, for the entire world. Because naming enhances the "relationship between language and reality" (Pin-Fat, 2000:9), Davutoğlu launched his own language game, in which his terminology kept expanding as the Arab Spring unfolded into the Arab Uprisings. Naming Turkey "pivotal state," "natural actor," "wise country," "pro-active" or "smart power," he sought to carve out an international perception, which would eventually turn into a reality, suggesting that new Turkey is uniquely slated for re-establishing the new world order. Davutoğlu almost expected language to create reality, a universal reality, immediately after it was first used. Davutoğlu's language, however, did not agree with reality about Turkey's capabilities and his references to the past in this language did not underpin the universality he sought through the revival of Pax Ottomanica.

The Middle East is a region that has experienced all the sad effects of historical imperialism and colonization, but what is even sadder seems to be the cognitive imperialism and colonization forced on people by the single truths of faith-based mindsets and historical narratives. Neo-Ottomanism, although it proposes "looser forms of interaction" than an empire and rhetorically supports multiculturalism, is derived from the historical and cognitive legacy of a Sunni-faith based imperial model. As

a foreign-policy attitude, in that sense, it risks perpetuating the acute humanitarian problems in the Middle East and fails to deliver the universal cosmopolitan hope for "human ingenuity, practical examination and political prudence and good judgment" (Dallmayr, 2005:27). "Ankara," as Soner Çağatay from the Washington Institute highlights, "has bet heavily on one faction in the Middle East and repeatedly lost" (Çağatay, 2016:4). Such is still the case in the post-Davutoğlu era.

Particularism in disguise of universalism spreads false ideas on world order, permanent peace and human unity. Revival of the historical models of empire as new universal paradigms would recharge old rivalries and refresh memories of enmity. It should not come as a surprise that "the rulers and the ruled had differing perspectives on empire" and it is a historical reality that empires are "unsustainable because their subjects find them intolerable." Historical records and imperial life have repeatedly demonstrated that "no one became an imperial subject voluntarily" (Parsons, 2010:2, 4, 8). Therefore, investing in the memories of an empire as the universal ground for permanent peace in a region of structural, intractable conflicts would only evoke the same negative sentiments throughout. The neo-Ottomanist tone of the new Turkish foreign policy on the one hand promises the return of Pax Ottomanica to the Middle East as its authentic set-up prior to the Western interference; on the other hand, it suggests a self-assumed leadership for Turkey, which does not harmonize with most of its macro capabilities and is therefore not sufficient to beat the bitterness of prejudices against empire. In other words, Turkey's recent investment in Pax Ottomanica lacks both capacity and clients. Furthermore, it also now lacks clear, explicit linguistic formulations the Strategic Depth once provided.

Turkey's current preoccupation with the resurgence of Ottoman ideals in its neighboring geography has been charged up with a reaction against its republican tradition of secular, non-interventionist, Western-oriented foreign policy as well as with hopes for the eventual revival of the Hamidian sphere of influence spreading beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Nevertheless, after an eventful decade, Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth vision has not unfolded in the way he envisaged, and Turkey, for the first time since 1923, has developed a foreign-policy position intervening in the neighbour states and challenging both the international system and organizations. Of all actors involved in Syria, Turkey, unfortunately, "would appear in the worst position compared to 2011" (Phillips, 2016:233). Although "'empire' is… re-emerging as the historic epitome of an ordering power stretching out over territory" (Parker, 2010:110) and it has once again become meaningful "in discussions of hierarchy in International Relations" (Jordheim and Neuman, 2011:154), it does not automatically qualify for a new universally peace-bringing agent, regardless of what its historical narrative is. Turkey's dealings with the Syrian crisis and the rhetoric of Pax Ottomanica and neo-Ottomanism have demonstrated that talking about the past did not mean talking about peace; talking about the past could in fact prevent peace.

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