

Introduction

Due to its location along the Bosphorus, the area currently known as Türkiye has traditionally been a meeting point of western and eastern cultures. What resulted was a *melange* of values that have created the Turkish society we know of nowadays. This diverse cultural heritage, together with its distinctive geostrategic position – serving as a land bridge between East and West and controlling the straits connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean – has also influenced Türkiye's foreign policy approach. Pro-western rhetoric was exchanged with pan-Islamic oratory in the 20th century with President Turgut Özal so as to best suit the interests of the country when needed. The latest example of such a versatile political behaviour can be identified with neo-Ottomanism. Wastnidge defined neo-Ottomanism as an imperialist Turkish political ideology that emphasises a stronger political commitment by the Republic of Türkiye within regions previously ruled by the Ottoman Empire¹.

Similar to the renaissance developed in Italy that thereafter spread to the rest of the western European continent exalting the glorious past of the Roman empire throughout the 15th and 16th century, neo-Ottomanism aimed at the reconstruction of an identity drawing from the features that typified the bygone empire. The restoration of these qualities was designed to fit a modern society that the ruling elite of the country could interpret in the way that best benefits them. This is what Yavuz defined as politics of nostalgia, namely a wave of new imagined politics based on a constructed past that is intended to be adjusted to fit the present and future².

Nevertheless, there can be a variety of interpretations of the same past. This was the case for the Turkish President Turgut Özal and now for the current head of state, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has adopted two competing and conflicting forms of neo-Ottomanism. While the former had a neo-liberal and civic view that was open to the west and focused on solving domestic challenges, the latter proposes an anti-Kemalist and pan-Islamic version, one that applies to foreign interventions delineated by an Umma-

¹ Wastnidge, E. (2 January 2019). "[Imperial Grandeur and Selective Memory: Re-assessing Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish Foreign and Domestic Politics](#)". *Middle East Critique*. 28 (1): 7–28. doi:[10.1080/19436149.2018.1549232](#). ISSN [1943-6149](#)

² Yavuz, H. M. (2020). *Nostalgia for the empire: the politics of neo-Ottomanism*. Oxford University Press.

based and authoritarian system³. In both instances, there has been an influence of neo-Ottomanism on Turkish policymaking, with a notable difference being that Erdoğan's interpretation of it has yielded territorial expansion.

In this paper, President Erdoğan's understanding of neo-Ottomanism is considered. The choice of this topic stems from the desire to better comprehend the ideology's presence in present-day Turkish foreign policy that has been embraced with ever-growing intensity⁴. To best find evidence on the subject, this research takes into consideration a case study that shows given influence in leading Turkish interventions abroad. To be more precise, the case of Syria proves to be the most significant case study to use for proving such influence, as Turkish military forces have created Turkish controlled territories in its northern regions since 2016. The timeframe this paper considers focuses on the beginning of Turkish presence in northern Syria in 2016 until the end of Syria's Civil war in November 2024.

In the upcoming sections the core principles composing neo-Ottomanism are first described. Subsequently, these principles will be applied to Ankara's foreign policy under Erdoğan with a specific focus on Turkish military operations in Syria.

The Origins and Changes of Neo-Ottomanism Prior to Erdoğan

Throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire evolved from a pluralistic state to one where Islam became the main unifying element, especially after receiving Muslim minorities expelled from other regions⁵. After the fall of the Empire, Kemalism pushed for a break with the Ottoman past by modernising and secularising the new Republic of Turkey. Islam was identified as an obstacle to progress⁶. However, the process of modernisation

³ Mehmet, O. (2020). The Ottoman Legacy and Neo-Ottomanism: A Review Article. *Insight Turkey*, 22(4), 253-261. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26981726>

⁴ See Felde, R. (2020). *EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IN UNCHARTED WATERS: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities* (pp. 59-65, Rep.) (Tanchum M., Ed.). Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Retrieved May 14, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28862.12>; The Economist. (2020, August 1). *Turkey is wielding influence all over the Arab world*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/08/01/turkey-is-wielding-influence-all-over-the-arab-world>; Marcou, J. (2021). Les relations turco-irakiennes: de l'inconstance au ménage à trois. *Confluences Méditerranée*, 116, 147-156. [https://doi.org/10.3917/ come.116.0149](https://doi.org/10.3917/come.116.0149)

⁵ Yavuz, H. M. (2020). *Nostalgia for the empire: the politics of neo-Ottomanism*. Oxford University Press.

⁶ Ibidem

created crises of legitimacy, normativity and identity that, together with changes internal and external to the country, paved the way for the resurgence of neo-Ottoman ideology in Turkey⁷.

It was Turgut Özal who tried to fix this crisis by making use for the first time of neo-Ottomanism. Özal, a Prime Minister and then President of Türkiye, characterised by a clear pro-European and neo-liberal approach during his term from 1989 until 1993, made use of this ideology to contain the growing demands of Kurdish nationalist— a problem that arose from the lack of a unified Turkish identity left behind by Kemalism – the post-Ataturk era. In his view, Turkishness was not the solution, since both Turks and Kurds were Muslim and the offspring of the Ottoman Empire⁸. His attempt to create a new identity was made easier by the democratisation of Türkiye after the 1950s and associated economic development, which, together with the usage of media, allowed him to challenge the ideologies of the Kemalist hegemony.

In the modern era, a different form of neo-Ottomanism was adopted by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His religious, Islamic, anti-European, pan-Islamic, Umma-based, exclusivist, and authoritarian stance created a distinct approach if compared to the one that Özal adopted. This was especially the case in his use of Ottoman-related rhetoric to justify foreign actions. In the following section, Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman perspective is analysed to comprehend the extent to the which it has influenced Turkish foreign interventions in contemporary times.

Neo-Ottomanism in Türkiye's Current Foreign Policy

Understanding Turkish foreign policy has become more complicated since Erdoğan took power. Stability and predictability were prioritised in Ankara, and Türkiye was known for maintaining good relations with almost everyone, the main exception being Syria and Israel. As Umar put it, "Turkey was considered a role model for nearly all Arab countries"⁹. What Umar underlined by means of this statement was the potential in world politics that Türkiye acquired leading the Arab world although not pertaining to it. Türkiye, thus, was

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ Ibidem

⁹ Umar, S. (2022). The Rise and Fall of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 20, 208–219.

an example for Arab Muslim countries as it managed to find a place in European and world politics while being a majority Muslim democracy that boasted a robust and functioning economy.

Within a few years of Erdoğan's election, stability and predictability stopped being the essential philosophies guiding Turkish foreign policies. Exemplary of this trend was a speech that Erdogan held on national television in 2005. In this speech, the Turkish President delineated three core principles composing neo-Ottomanism, namely (1) strategic depth, (2) multidimensional foreign policy, and (3) pivotal/central country¹⁰. According to this narrative, the goal of neo-Ottomanism was to become the main actor establishing the path that Türkiye and the overarching region pertaining to the Ottoman Empire ought to take.

The root of this change can be identified within the 2001 Strategic Depth doctrine forwarded by Ahmet Davutoğlu before becoming the Minister of Foreign Affairs. In this doctrine, the idea of a shared historical, cultural, and religious past that unites the Middle East to Türkiye coincided with the principles of neo-Ottomanism as described by Erdoğan's speech¹¹. A specific emphasis was set on the Muslim-led approach that Türkiye had to opt for to aim for a stance in an emerging multi-dimensional world order¹². What remained clear was that the concept of strategic depth was adamant to justify and boost Türkiye's new geopolitical interests in areas that had been under Ottoman dominion for centuries¹³.

In this new political environment, the neo-Ottoman sway on Türkiye 's foreign policy became evident. *Vis-a-vis* Özal, Erdoğan's interpretation of this ideology was much more assertive. Ankara augmented its engagement in regions that once belonged to the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Middle East¹⁴. Moreover, the Turkish political elite started to portray Türkiye as a country destined to become a religious leader and a

¹⁰ Volfová, G. Ö. (2016). Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP. *Die Welt Des Islams*, 56(3/4), 489–510.

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² Murinson, A. (2006). The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), 945–964.

¹³ Volfová, G. Ö. (2016). Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP. *Die Welt Des Islams*, 56(3/4), 489–510.

¹⁴ See Danforth, N. (2015, March 12). *Exhuming Turkey's Past*. Foreign Affairs.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-03-11/exhuming-turkeys-past>.

landmark for the Sunni Islamic world. This trend gained *momentum* as the European Union (EU) rejected Turkey's accession in 2005 and 2015, finally freezing its admission process in 2016. The distancing from the West facilitated a shift in Ankara's narrative towards projecting itself as a religious leader. Ultimately, this shift reinforced the desire to become a symbol of pan-Islamic renaissance.

In domestic affairs, Erdoğan's neo-Ottomanism complemented the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). It served to realise his project of exchanging the 95-year-old parliamentary system with a presidential system increasingly leaning towards an autocracy. In doing so, Türkiye once again introduced a structure that was more in line with the Ottoman era where a centralised leadership – the Sultanate – guided its subjects.

This centralisation of power led to public outcry. The fear of witnessing the rise of a modern-day Sultan caused protests – such as the 2013 Gezi Park protests – that were violently repressed by the authorities on the orders of President Erdoğan. With the 2016 coup attempt, President Erdoğan amassed even more power, worsening public suspicions. In addition, political repression of opposition parties demonstrated a significant shift towards an autocratic system in Türkiye, one that shows no signs of reversing in the present day (see arrest of opposition leader Imamoglu in March 2025).

An example of this change can be seen in how the Turkish President has granted ministries to loyalists instead of competent policy makers. In doing so, as Umar explained, “[m]ost of the time foreign policy decisions and the initiatives that [followed] have been formulated and executed above all to satisfy and boost the ego of Erdogan [...] under the guidance of Islam in general and one specific sect in particular (Sunni Islam)”¹⁵. The deriving result was shifting from a non-interference rule in other countries' affairs to a problematic intrusion in the domestic affairs of various countries surrounding Türkiye. Most significantly, these actions were commonly taken in countries pertaining to the geographical extension of the Ottoman empire.

The definitive turning point that introduced an assertive neo-Ottoman stance in the Turkish foreign policy came with the Arab Spring of 2011. Based on the hope that the Muslim Brotherhood would come to power in the great majority of Arab countries,

¹⁵ Umar, S. (2022). The Rise and Fall of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 20, 208–219.

Erdoğan decided that the time had come for Türkiye to lead the Middle East¹⁶. Sunni Islam, once the core of the Ottoman Empire, established itself again as a main driver shaping Turkish foreign actions.

Had the Muslim governments stayed in power, the Arab Spring would have perhaps served as Türkiye's great opportunity to smoothly project its neo-Ottoman sphere of influence in the entire region¹⁷. The attempt to take over the leadership of Arab countries, after initial success in establishing its control in key areas, ended in failure. This was the case in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in taking power with Morsi, ousting Mubarak in the 2012 elections. Soon after, the Muslim Brotherhood's inability to govern effectively culminated in the overthrow of the president in a coup orchestrated by Al-Sisi in 2013. Even so, this helped revitalise the idea of a new, increasingly religious and less secular Turkey, ready to position itself and lead all Sunni Islamist countries¹⁸.

The increasingly territorial focus of the new Turkish foreign approach became evident in the President's followers. Ahmet Davutoğlu, for instance, signalled a considerable shift in his mentality by shying away from his initial "zero problems with neighbours" mind-set towards a more expansive stance. Supporting this change was a speech he gave in 2013 before becoming Prime Minister where he stated that:

The last century was only a parenthesis for us. We will close that parenthesis [...]; we will again tie Sarajevo to Damascus, Benghazi to Erzurum to Batumi. This core of our power. These may look like different countries to you, but Yemen and Skoplje were part of the same country a hundred and ten years ago, as were Erzum and Benghazi¹⁹.

Following Davutoğlu's declarations, the believe that Türkiye had indeed adopted an increasingly expansionist attitude in ex-Ottoman territories started to gain ground. Heralding this change in the Turkish foreign affairs paradigm, in the Economist it was observed that Türkiye was recently expanding its influence in areas that once belonged to the Ottoman empire²⁰.

¹⁶ Ibidem

¹⁷ Volfová, G. Ö. (2016). Turkey's Middle Eastern Endeavors: Discourses and Practices of Neo-Ottomanism under the AKP. *Die Welt Des Islams*, 56(3/4), 489–510.

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ Umar, S. (2022). The Rise and Fall of Turkish Foreign Policy. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 20, 208–219.

²⁰ The Economist. (2020, August 1). *Turkey is wielding influence all over the Arab world*. The Economist.

One of the most relevant ideologies justifying territorial expansions in Ottoman territory can be found in Turkification. This concept, adopted by the Young Turks to create a state out of the Ottoman Empire, has been used by critics of this school of thought, advocating that non-Turks (Kurds, Arabs and non-Muslims) have been deprived of their established social, political and cultural rights²¹. Its employment habitually consisted of top-down measures that coerced administrative integration and cultural assimilation²². In this way, it was possible to incorporate people along-side the territory they inhabit to Türkiye.

It is possible to identify this assertive attitude of Turkey, especially in Syria, where the use of soft power was replaced by the application of hard power. The explanation for such a shift centres on the Kurdish presence in Syria, which raised greater concerns compared to other neighbouring countries, such as Iraq, where Ankara maintained good relations with the Iraqi Kurds of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Indeed, there were fears in Syria of the creation of a terror corridor by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, which is considered a terrorist organisation by the authorities. This apprehension prompted Turkish military intervention in Syria. The implementation of hard power can be traced back to Turkey's neo-Ottoman foreign interventions.

Neo-Ottomanism in practice: the case of Syria

Turkish interest in Syria rose in the 1970s, mainly amongst the Islamist community. In those years, the Hafez Assad regime was believed to be repressing Syria's Sunni majority, favouring instead the Alawite minority²³. This account followed the growing prominence that the Muslim Brotherhood was picking on in the region. Türkiye was urged to move away from its secular stance and actively help its Sunni fellows in Syria. Consequently, in the 1990s, the Assad regime energetically sought to destabilise Türkiye by hosting and training members of the Kurdish separatist Kurdistan Worker's Party

<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/08/01/turkey-is-wielding-influence-all-over-the-arab-world>.

²¹ Veen, E., & Yüksel, E. (2019). Turkey in northwestern Syria: Rebuilding empire at the margins. *Clingendael*.

<https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turkey-northwestern-syria>

²² See Ülker, E., 'Contextualising 'Turkification': Nationbuilding in the late Ottoman Empire, 1908-18', *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol.11, pp:613-636, 2005.

²³ Özkan, B. (2019). *Relations between Turkey and Syria in the 1980's and 1990's: Political Islam, Muslim Brotherhood and Intelligence Wars*, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 16, No. 62, pp. 5-25, DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.588893

(PKK)²⁴. The lingering tension between both parts grew even more once Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the PKK, fled to Syria to escape persecution in Türkiye. A situation that Özkan described as being the most significant cause of damage to Turkish-Syrian relations since Ankara defined the PKK as a terrorist organisation threatening the country's security²⁵.

Türkiye's growing interest in exerting greater influence over Syria became evident after 2011. Ankara forwarded the most ambitious as well as riskiest foreign policy in the history of the Republic to establish a Sunni regime in Syria²⁶. This was the case since Türkiye bet on the collapse of Assad's regime briefly after the Arab Spring. As it turned out, the 2011 revolution developed into a civil war that constantly weakened instead of taking down the regime until November 2024. The consequence was that the Syrian army withdrew from the norther region to strengthen the core of the country thereby leaving a vacuum of power along the Turkish border. A vacuum that was thereafter occupied by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) – the Syrian branch of the PKK, with which Ankara had been fighting for more than 30 years.

The struggle to overthrow the Assad regime intensified once again in 2015. The goal remained unchanged: substituting the existing regime with a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood-inspired government. This time, more focus was set on containing and untying the political and military progresses of Syria's Kurds²⁷. With the claim of protecting national security, Türkiye created a buffer zone between its border shared with Syria. Thus, Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) in 2016 and Operation Olive Branch (OOB) in 2018 enabled the establishment of this Turkish militarily controlled zone. This is how a successful proxy war directed by Türkiye managed to gain territory from a debilitated Syria.

²⁴ FDD (2025, March 6). *10 things to know about Turkey's interventions and influence in Syria*. Foundation for Defense of Democracies. <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/02/24/10-things-to-know-about-turkeys-interventions-and-influence-in-syria/>

²⁵ Özkan, B. (2019). *Relations between Turkey and Syria in the 1980's and 1990's: Political Islam, Muslim Brotherhood and Intelligence Wars*, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Vol. 16, No. 62, pp. 5-25, DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.588893

²⁶ FDD (2025, March 6). *10 things to know about Turkey's interventions and influence in Syria*. Foundation for Defense of Democracies. <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/02/24/10-things-to-know-about-turkeys-interventions-and-influence-in-syria/>; Özkan, B. (2019). *Relations between Turkey and Syria in the 1980's and 1990's: Political Islam, Muslim Brotherhood and Intelligence Wars*, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Vol. 16, No. 62, pp. 5-25, DOI: 10.33458/uidergisi.588893

²⁷ Veen, E., & Yüksel, E. (2019). *Turkey in northwestern Syria: Rebuilding empire at the margins*. *Clingendael*. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turkey-northwestern-syria>

A neo-Ottoman advance characterised the process of establishing a definite control over the area. Ankara deployed an array of governance, socioeconomic and, most importantly, cultural-religious interventions to augment its control over the Syrian territory²⁸. The establishment of institutions controlled by Türkiye in these regions had a consistent impact on the cultural perception of the population. In fact, it was possible to observe an introduction of state Islamism based on a grid of religious teachers that spread Ankara's political interpretation of Islam among the local population²⁹.

In strict collaboration with the Syrian National Coalition (SNC) and its military wing, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) managed to establish a relatively stable region. Even after Turkish led military operations ended, Ankara kept on financing the military control over the buffer zone. In fact, a new military body – the Syrian National Army (SNA) – paid and trained by Türkiye, was put together from groups that composed the FSA to oversee the area³⁰.

Throughout the following years, Türkiye maintained control over the north-western Syrian regions while exerting military pressure on the surrounding provinces. On October 9th of 2019, the TAF started Operation Peace Spring (OPS). With this operation, the TAF together with the SNA bombed, and consequently moved into north-eastern Syria where Kurdish-led militia were positioned. The Turkish President justified his action by saying that he was willing to destroy the terror corridor composed of Kurdish militants which was supposed to be established on the southern border of Türkiye³¹.

Nevertheless, OPS led to pushback against Turkish actions in Syria by the US, Israel, and Russia, who were active in the area. This caused a military setback for Erdoğan who, regardless, refrained from withdrawing from the area announcing a year later that further military action would be taken to maintain control over the border area³². This is what eventually happened in January of 2022 when President Erdoğan decided to augment

²⁸ Ibidem

²⁹ Ibidem

³⁰ Veen, E., & Yüksel, E. (2019). Turkey in northwestern Syria: Rebuilding empire at the margins. *Clingendael*. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turkey-northwestern-syria>

³¹ The Economist. (2019, October 10). *Turkey launches an attack on northern Syria*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/10/10/turkey-launches-an-attack-on-northern-syria>.

³² Al Jazeera. (2020, October 28). *Erdogan warns of military action in Syria, decries Russian strike*. Recep Tayyip Erdogan News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/28/erdogan-warns-of-military-action-in-syria-decries-russian-strike>.

the frontline in Syria to expand its influence in further regions³³.

While Türkiye was enlarging its influence on Syrian soil, the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) started to consolidate power as well. The HTS, previously an Al-Qaeda affiliate, consists of a coalition of northern Syria-based Sunni Islamist insurgent groups, recognised by many western governments as being a terrorist group. In 2019, it managed to gain control of Idlib, the northern Syrian province bordering the Turkish controlled buffer zone. Although Türkiye at first intended to increase control of this province, it precluded a military offensive against HTS for future strategic benefits³⁴. This decision proved to be far-sighted since HTS shared the same goal of toppling Assad's regime³⁵ and managed to effectively expand its sway towards the centre of Syria at the cost of Assad's regime.

Following this strategy, Türkiye established itself as the main interlocutor with HTS. Although Ankara officially designated HTS a terrorist organisation – following the example of and pressure from the US and UN – Türkiye preserved communication as well as cooperation with the group³⁶. Ankara did so until the HTS managed to overthrow the Assad regime, which led to the dissolution of the group on the 29th of January 2025 and the consolidation of Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly al-Golani) as the country's official leader.

By facilitating support to the HTS, President Erdoğan gained a significant strategic advantage that has allowed him to become a close ally to the new interim president al-Sharaa – the previous head of HTS. By portraying the interim president of Syria as moderate, Erdoğan is hoping to redeem favours and transform Syria into a launchpad for regionally projecting power³⁷.

³³ See Yazici, E., & Cüngurlu, F. (2022). Turkey in Review: January 19 – February 7, 2022. *Institute for the Study of War*. <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Turkey%20in%20Review%202022-02-10.pdf>

³⁴ Veen, E., & Yüksel, E. (2019). Turkey in northwestern Syria: Rebuilding empire at the margins. *Clingendael*. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/turkey-northwestern-syria>

³⁵ See Newlee D. (2018). *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS): Terrorism backgrounders*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. <https://www.csis.org/programs/former-programs/warfare-irregular-threats-and-terrorism-program-archives/terrorism-backgrounders/hayat-tahrir>

³⁶ FDD (2025, March 6). *10 things to know about Turkey's interventions and influence in Syria*. Foundation for Defense of Democracies. <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/02/24/10-things-to-know-about-turkeys-interventions-and-influence-in-syria/>

³⁷ Ibidem

Interpreting Turkish presence in Syria from a Neo-Ottoman perspective

The presence of Türkiye in Syria developed at various stages. On the one hand, it managed to gain a foothold on Syrian territory by means of military interventions, especially with the OES and OOB. Whereas on the other hand, it succeeded in paving the way for a Sunni leadership to overthrow the Alawite Assad regime. The territorial and religious expansion in Syria falls within the neo-Ottoman ideological framework. Under President Erdoğan's guidance, neo-Ottomanism kept on forming part of his political narrative throughout its mandate. He did so unconditionally especially since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War.

The perseverance in not dropping this discourse after the regional setback forced on Ankara by the US and Russia in 2019 helped Türkiye to find an advantageous situation with the recent Syrian change of government. Having actively participated in the toppling of the Assad Regime for over a decade gives Türkiye a preferred position amongst the allies of the interim government. A position that most likely will be maintained if Sunni leader al-Sharaa manages to finalise the establishment of a permanent government.

From a neo-Ottoman perspective, this change epitomises a win, as Türkiye managed to help establish another Sunni led country next door. This strengthens the Turkish claim of representing the leadership of a Sunni Islamic society – especially in the Middle East. With the likely support and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria, the political sphere can be swayed into accepting this stance thereby increasing the regional power of Türkiye in the region.

The ideological goal forwarded by neo-Ottomanism and the actual situation in Syria poses, nevertheless, practical challenges to Türkiye's success. The territorial gains that Türkiye obtained in northern Syria might pose a problem to the collaboration between the new government and Ankara. Syria is in the position to redeem these territories so as to re-establish its full sovereignty over its territory. This, in turn, creates a complex situation for the neo-Ottoman stance which Erdoğan has been using to justify Turkish establishments on Syrian soil. In doing so, helping a Sunni led government to reach power might lead to the loss of Turkish militarily controlled areas.

Conclusions

This paper examined the security dynamics between Türkiye and Syria, focusing on the influence of neo-Ottomanism in the Turkish foreign policy. It highlighted how historical references, ideological differences, and power struggles have contributed to shaping bilateral relations, particularly in the post-Arab Spring era, between Syria and Türkiye. What appeared after analysing these relations was that Ankara's security concerns are framed around a political narrative based on religious and geographical expansion in neighbouring countries. The study underscores how Türkiye's military interventions, such as Operation Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Peace Spring, were aimed at territorial gains that would help projecting regional influence. Syria's fragmented governance facilitated Turkish territorial additions along with the implantation of religious-linked cultural establishment in the north of the country.

Overall, the paper managed to point out that neo-Ottomanism never stopped swaying Turkish foreign policy since Erdoğan took power in 2002. However, it remains uncertain if the gains achieved in Syria during the past decade will persist. Future cooperation between Ankara and Damascus depends on how the interim government of Syria will manage the territorial gains which Türkiye achieved since 2016. Perhaps sharing the same religion does not necessarily mean overlooking territorial issues as a neo-Ottoman perspective might hope for.

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