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From Solidarity to Strategy: The Politics of Erdoğan's Palestine Discourse and Parliamentary Contestation in Türkiye

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Abstract

This thesis explores how President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and members of The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) discursively frame the Gaza conflict, focusing on key speeches and parliamentary debates between October 2023 and September 2024. Erdoğan's speeches at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), and the Great Palestine Rally are analyzed alongside parliamentary debates in the TBMM to examine how his rhetorical strategies shift across international, national, and public platforms and how parliamentary discourse either reinforces or challenges his framing of the Gaza conflict.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing theory, the study identifies four dominant narrative frames: Western Hypocrisy, Symbolic vs. Substantive Action, Historical Solidarity, and Turkish Agency that shape Türkiye's political positioning and moral rhetoric. The analysis finds that Erdoğan consistently positions Türkiye as a moral authority and defender of Palestinian rights, using Western Hypocrisy and Historical Solidarity frames most strongly in public and international forums, while the Symbolic vs. Substantive Action frame emerges more sharply in domestic parliamentary debates. TBMM discourse predominantly echoes the government's positioning, though opposition parties at times contest the moral exclusivity of Erdoğan's narrative.

Keywords: *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), Gaza conflict, 7th of October, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Framing theory, Political instrumentalization; Western hypocrisy; Historical solidarity; Turkish foreign policy, Moral authority; Islamic identity; Parliamentary debates*

List of Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
AFAD	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
DEVA	Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (Democracy and Progress Party)
HAMAS	Harakat al-Muqāwamah al-'Islāmiyyah (Islamic Resistance Movement)
HEDEP	Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party)
HÜDA PAR	Hür Dava Partisi (Free Cause Party)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Cooperation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Milletler Meclisi (The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye)
UN	United Nations
UNRWA	The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

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1. Introduction

The Palestinian question has remained one of the most pressing and emotionally charged issues in global politics for over 75 years. The long-standing occupation, repeated cycles of violence, and failed peace efforts have kept the conflict at the centre of international debate. The most recent escalation began on October 7th, 2023, with HAMAS Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-'Islāmiyyah (Islamic Resistance Movement) surprise attacks on southern Israel and Israel's subsequent large-scale assault on Gaza. Since then, political leaders around the world have responded in different ways, some with strong condemnations, others with calls for mediation or restraint.

The Palestinian question has long been central to Turkish foreign policy, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has repeatedly voiced strong support for the Palestinian cause, especially for Hamas, which he often frames as a legitimate resistance movement. However, despite Erdoğan's public solidarity with Palestine, protests erupted at the government-linked TRT World Forum in Istanbul on November 29, 2023, where nine young activists were arrested after publicly urging President Erdoğan to fully sever ties with Israel (BIA News Desk, 2024). Their intervention happened during a high-profile event featuring senior officials and international guests drew attention to the gap between Türkiye's symbolic support for Palestine and its ongoing economic relations with Israel. The arrests provoked widespread debate and raised questions not only about foreign policy but also about the sincerity of the government's pro-Palestinian stance. This moment of interruption highlights a deeper tension in Turkish political discourse. Although pro-Palestinian sentiment is widespread, with recent polls showing support levels exceeding 80% across the political spectrum (Uğur et al., 2024), the interpretation of the Palestinian question varies significantly depending on the actors and the context.

This tension between words and actions, between moral positioning and political strategy forms the starting point for this study. This thesis explores how President Erdoğan constructs and uses the Palestinian cause in his speeches following the October 7 Hamas-led attacks on Israel. The events of October 7th marked a turning point in regional politics, triggering a full-scale war/genocide in Gaza and prompting global reactions, including a sharp rhetorical intensification from Türkiye. Erdoğan's framing of the conflict, including his public support for Hamas and condemnation of Israel, not only shaped Türkiye's international posture but also resonated deeply within domestic politics.

In 2023, Türkiye held deeply polarised national elections and marked the 100th anniversary of the Republic. The elections were shaped by sharp ideological divides between President Erdoğan's conservative-nationalist bloc and a broad opposition alliance that promised democratic reforms and a return to parliamentary rule. The campaign was dominated by culture war rhetoric, economic anxiety, and nationalist appeals from both sides, including anti-migrant and anti-LGBTQ+ messaging. The close results, with Erdoğan winning just over 52% in a runoff, reflected a country split not only politically but socially and culturally (Civicus, 2023). Within this complex setting, Erdoğan's discourse on Gaza cannot be viewed simply as foreign policy. It also functions as a domestic political tool: a way to perform leadership, manage ideological divisions, and reassert a certain vision of national identity.

This study uses a combination of CDA and framing theory to examine how Erdoğan's language shifts across different settings: mass rallies, diplomatic summits, and formal announcements, and what these shifts reveal about the broader political goals behind his rhetoric. While Erdoğan's discourse plays a central role in shaping public narratives, it is only one part of a broader discursive field. To gain a fuller picture of how the Palestinian cause is discussed in Türkiye, the study also includes parliamentary debates, focusing on how politicians from other parties either support or challenge Erdoğan's framing. Together, these materials offer insight into how the

Palestinian cause is not only supported but also symbolically instrumentalised across different branches of Turkish politics.

Despite the political weight of these discourses, surprisingly little research has critically examined how both the executive and legislative branches frame the Palestinian question in public rhetoric. This leaves a gap in our understanding of whether Türkiye's leaders are truly unified in their message about Palestine, or if important differences and points of tension are being overlooked. While there has been substantial scholarship on Türkiye's foreign policy toward Palestine, few studies take a close, comparative look at how political actors within state institutions negotiate its meaning. Examining these discourses side by side is essential for understanding how issues of national identity, legitimacy, and foreign policy are constructed and contested; in other words, how the meaning of "Palestinian solidarity" is shaped, shared, or challenged at the highest levels of Turkish politics.

1.1. Research question and Aim

This study investigates how Turkish political elites have framed the Palestinian question in public discourse following the Gaza War of October 7th, 2023, to reveal the strategic functions of such framing in shaping domestic political narratives and foreign policy positioning. The analysis covers the period from October 2023 to September 2024. The study focuses especially on the discursive practices and framing strategies employed by President Erdoğan and parliamentary actors in their responses to high-profile events.

A primary aim of this study is to uncover the power relations, ideological positions, and strategic choices embedded in Turkish elite discourse on Palestine, using CDA and frame analysis. It explores the language, metaphors, and strategies used by the executive and legislative branches, identifying patterns of unity and points of contestation within Türkiye's official narratives. A secondary aim is to examine how

other political actors, particularly opposition MPs, respond to or challenge Erdoğan's narrative, in order to highlight the contested nature of the Palestinian question in Turkish parliamentary discourse. It explores the language, metaphors, and strategies used by the executive and legislative branches, looking for both patterns of unity and points of contestation within Türkiye's official narratives on Palestine. CDA helps us explore how word choices, sentence structure, and narrative techniques express authority and reflect ideology, while frame analysis shows how crisis events like the Gaza War are presented in ways that aim to build public support or weaken opposition. By combining these methods, the study does more than list political messages: it reveals how national identity is deliberately shaped, how foreign-policy positions are defended through language, and how elites generate public agreement under pressure, insights that a simple content analysis or rhetorical overview would overlook, yet which are crucial for understanding the deeper layers of political communication.

To achieve this, the study is guided by the following main research question: *How do President Erdoğan and various political parties in the Turkish Parliament frame the Palestinian question in their discourse following the war on Gaza of October 7th, 2023, and what shifts are observable in Erdoğan's rhetoric during this period?*

Sub-questions:

1. What political and ideological purposes do these different framings serve within the domestic context?
2. How is the Palestinian question symbolically instrumentalised to legitimise specific policies, identities, or leadership claims?
3. In what ways do political actors position themselves to one another through their discourse on Palestine, and to what strategic ends?

Together, the aims and research questions establish a framework for analysing how discourse shapes political narratives and responses. This approach offers new insights into the contested nature of the Palestinian question in Türkiye and contributes to wider discussions on language, power, and identity in international politics. The

following literature review positions this study within broader academic debates and highlights its theoretical and empirical relevance.

1.2. Background

In October 2023, after a big rise in violence in Gaza, Türkiye under President Erdoğan emerged as one of the most vocal international actors condemning the humanitarian crisis and advocating for Palestinian rights. Erdoğan described the situation as a “massacre” and a “violation of the morality of war,” calling for global solidarity with the Palestinian people and urging restraint from all parties (Al Jazeera, 2023). Türkiye’s humanitarian response was prompt and extensive: over 100,000 tons of aid were delivered to Gaza, including food, medical supplies, and shelter materials, coordinated through AFAD and in partnership with UNRWA (Daily Sabah, 2025). While Türkiye’s stance resonated strongly across the Muslim world, condemnation of the humanitarian catastrophe extended far beyond. The United Nations, the European Union, and governments such as Canada, France, and South Africa expressed serious concern over the scale of civilian suffering and called for immediate ceasefires and unrestricted humanitarian access (ESCWA, 2023; OHCHR, 2024). These developments once again placed the Palestinian question at the heart of Türkiye’s foreign policy discourse and domestic political theatre, reinforcing Erdoğan’s image as a defender of Muslim causes and aligning with the ideological priorities of his conservative base (Insight Türkiye, 2024).

The roots of Türkiye’s stance on the Palestinian cause can be found in its transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic. After the Republic was founded in 1923, Türkiye’s main goal was internal stability and modernization. Under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Türkiye followed a foreign policy based on neutrality and non-intervention, avoiding involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts, including the Palestinian question (Özlem, 2007). After World War II, Türkiye’s foreign policy became more complex as it aligned with the West during the

Cold War. Joining NATO in 1952, Türkiye became a strategic ally of the United States. This alliance influenced its Middle East policies and led Türkiye to recognize Israel in 1949, the first Muslim-majority country to do so (Altunisik, 2000; Fishman, 2013; Özlem, 2007; Topçu, 2018). Despite this, Ankara also tried to maintain good relations with Arab countries as pan-Arabism and anti-colonialism grew stronger. During this period, the Palestinian cause was not a top priority for Türkiye and mostly appeared in media or public discussions without deeply affecting official policies (Sırım, 2018).

The 1970s brought a shift as Türkiye became more engaged in Middle Eastern affairs. In 1975, Türkiye established official relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), showing a more balanced approach toward the Palestinian question. This step reflected the increasing global importance of the Palestinian cause and Türkiye's wish to play a greater regional role (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye; Özlem, 2007). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Türkiye maintained this dual approach, supporting Palestinian statehood while continuing economic and military relations with Israel. By the late 1990s, Turkish leaders like Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit started speaking more openly in favor of Palestinians. Ecevit's strong condemnation of Israeli military actions, calling them "genocide" in 2002, marked a clear shift in Türkiye's rhetoric and sensitivity to Palestinian suffering (Sırım, 2018, p. 367).

The most significant change occurred after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 (Akçapa, 2021, p. 37). The AKP's foreign policy was shaped by Ottoman-Islamic heritage and a vision of Türkiye as a moral leader in the Muslim world (Aras & Polat, 2007; Bayraktar, 2019). Türkiye's support for the Palestinian cause became more vocal and ideological. For example, Erdoğan harshly condemned the assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in 2004, calling it "state terrorism" (Sırım, 2018, p. 367). The 2008–2009 Gaza War and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, where Israeli forces killed Turkish activists, further worsened relations and strengthened Türkiye's identification with Palestinians. During this time, Türkiye framed support for Palestine as a moral duty, not just a diplomatic matter.

Erdoğan's sharp criticism of Israel at the 2009 Davos meeting and Türkiye's active humanitarian support through UNRWA highlighted this stance (Coşkun, 2012, p. 31; Özer, 2023, p.592).

Since the mid-2010s, Türkiye's engagement has remained strong in words but has become more cautious in practice. They continue to express emotional solidarity with Palestinians, often saying "*your pain is our pain, your future is our future*" (Özer, 2023, p. 592). The economic and energy interests have pushed Türkiye toward talks with Israel to normalize relations, revealing tensions between ideology and pragmatism (Akçapa, 2021, p. 42; Coşkun, 2012, p. 34). This mix of emotional commitment and strategic calculation characterizes Türkiye's current policy. Turkish aid groups remain active in Gaza, and Türkiye consistently supports Palestine in international organizations like the UN and the OIC, but these actions also serve domestic political goals and help Türkiye project soft power. This situation shows the difficulty Türkiye faces in balancing domestic politics, international ambitions, and regional alliances. This tension between symbolic support and political pragmatism is also reflected in Erdoğan's discourse (Coşkun, 2012, p. 32). As both head of state and a populist leader with deep ties to Islamic values, Erdoğan often uses emotionally charged language, moral claims, and strategic ambiguity to address the Palestinian question. His speeches, especially during the 2023 Gaza crisis, reveal how Türkiye's Palestinian policy is not only shaped by geopolitical interests, but also performed through public discourse aimed at different domestic and international audiences.

2. Literature Review

The Palestinian cause has long figured prominently in Türkiye's political discourse, tied to narratives of national identity, political legitimacy, and the country's regional and international role. Existing research largely falls into two sides: analyses of President Erdoğan's speeches often through discourse analysis, or populism and studies of Türkiye's foreign policy toward Palestine, mostly historical rather than discourse-focused. This review examines scholarship on Erdoğan's rhetoric, applications of CDA to leaders across the MENA region, and media framings of Türkiye's role in the Palestinian question. Collectively, this literature highlights both contributions and key gaps, particularly the absence of multi-actor discourse analysis in Türkiye between 7 October 2023 and September 2024. Addressing this gap, the present study positions itself at the intersection of political communication, critical discourse studies, and foreign policy analysis.

2.1. Political Rhetoric and Discursive Strategies of MENA Leaders

Political discourse in the MENA is often shaped by complex historical, religious, and ideological narratives. Leaders across the region use language strategically to construct legitimacy, mobilize support, and frame regional conflicts. CDA has been widely applied to examine these rhetorical strategies, offering insight into how power and identity are communicated through speech and media. Studies examining the public addresses of political leaders in the Middle East and North Africa have shown that speeches serve not only as vehicles for policy communication but also as carefully constructed performances of political identity. Much of this work has concentrated on a few prominent figures such as Jordan's King Abdullah II, Egypt's Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and Morocco's King Mohammed VI, with a smaller body of research exploring the rhetoric of leaders who emerged during or after the Arab Spring. For instance, Al-Haq & Al-Sleibi (2015) explore how King Abdullah II of Jordan crafts his speeches by

weaving together references to other leaders and employing indirect language to persuade international audiences, especially about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similarly, Hussein (2016) analyzes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's speeches during key national events, revealing that repetition and carefully chosen expressions serve to reinforce his political messages and unify the public.

Research on the speeches of Arab Spring leaders, who faced immense social upheaval, highlights significant changes in rhetorical style under crisis. Al Majali (2015) notes that these presidents intensified certain linguistic features, such as repeated phrases to strengthen their warnings and justify crackdowns on protests (p.107). Abu Hattab (2013) observes how these leaders shifted their self-presentation, moving from portraying themselves as almost invincible figures to adopting a more vulnerable and personal tone to gain sympathy and maintain authority.

Studies focusing on monarchs like King Mohammed VI of Morocco demonstrate a different use of language, where religious references and accumulative listing play a central role in establishing the monarch's moral legitimacy and fostering trust among citizens (Edouhiri, 2024, p. 102). Meanwhile, Helal (2021) shows how Tunisian political discourse often relies on metaphor and spatial language to create clear divisions between a virtuous "us" and a corrupt "them," simplifying political narratives to mobilize support.

Many of these studies use different types of CDA. They also use tools like metaphor analysis, deictic analysis, and cohesion analysis. These methods help uncover the deeper meanings in political language and uncover the ideological underpinnings, identity work, and power relations embedded in leaders' speech. While certain strategies such as metaphor, repetition, religious framing, and identity construction appear repeatedly across different contexts, their use and function are always shifts by the specific political conditions in which a leader operates.

While some studies have examined the political discourse of leaders across the MENA region, much of the existing research remains limited in scope, often focusing on a few prominent figures or specific moments such as the Arab Spring. In general,

there is still a shortage of comprehensive critical analyses exploring the discursive strategies employed by MENA leaders to construct political narratives, legitimize authority, and influence public opinion. Within the MENA Türkiye has received comparatively more attention, particularly regarding the rhetorical strategies of President Erdoğan. The following section reviews key studies on Erdoğan's discourse.

2.2. President Erdoğan's Political Discourse

The empirical studies specifically analyzing Erdoğan's speeches are relatively limited compared to the predominance of historical and thematic analyses in the literature. While many works explore the themes, ideology, and historical context of his discourse, only a few studies employ rigorous empirical methods such as quantitative content analysis or systematic CDA with detailed coding. For example, Çay & Kalkamanova (2023) provide an empirical quantitative content analysis of Erdoğan's election campaign speeches from 2004 to 2018, tracing the evolution of populist themes over time. Similarly, Demir (2025) critically examines Erdoğan's discourse as a strategic fusion of populism and hate speech, showing how anti-opposition rhetoric anchored in religiosity serves to polarize society and consolidate power. The study argues that Erdoğan's populism is reinforced by religious themes and often incorporates divisive language that frames political opponents as national threats (p. 72).

Sarwat et al. (2024) present one of the few studies that conducts a detailed, methodologically grounded analysis of a specific speech applying Fairclough's CDA and persuasion theory to Erdoğan's 2022 UN General Assembly address. However, studies of this kind are relatively rare; most research on Erdoğan's rhetoric tends to focus on historical developments or thematic discussions rather than systematic, close textual analysis of individual speeches. Similarly, other scholars apply classical rhetorical frameworks to trace Erdoğan's ethos, pathos, and logos appeals in key speeches, demonstrating how he builds authority and connects emotionally with the

electorate (Tekinalp, 2018). Bayram (2010) specifically analyzes Erdoğan's discourse in his short speech during the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2009. This paper explores how Erdoğan's linguistic background and personal identity shape his political rhetoric, arguing that his use of language operates as a powerful social tool to assert his characteristics and ideological stance, especially in moments of public confrontation. These studies provide rich, in-depth explorations of meaning, ideology, and power embedded in Erdoğan's discourse and highlight the adaptability of his rhetorical style across contexts.

Studies on Erdoğan's rhetoric regarding the Palestinian question often situate it within broader ideological frameworks shaping Turkish foreign policy. One dominant theme is neo-Ottomanism and anti-Westernism, where the Palestinian cause appears as part of a wider geopolitical and identity narrative. Hazır (2022), applying a critical constructivist approach, examines patterns of anti-Westernism in neo-Ottoman Turkish foreign policy. While not solely focused on the Palestinian question, the study highlights its function as a recurring reference point in constructing Türkiye's image as a historical guardian of Muslim causes. Similarly, Karmon & Barak (2018) adopt a historical perspective to trace shifts in Turkish foreign policy after the 2009 Gaza War and the Mavi Marmara incident. They argue that Erdoğan utilises the Palestinian question to boost Türkiye's standing in the Arab and Muslim world, framing it as a leading regional power, with the intensity and framing of this rhetoric evolving alongside foreign policy priorities.

Mengüaslan (2024) examines Türkiye's Gaza diplomacy following the events of October 7th using a process tracing method, highlighting the opportunities and challenges it presents for peacebuilding in Palestine. However, Mengüaslan's analysis has certain limitations. While the process tracing method effectively tracks diplomatic initiatives and political developments, the study primarily focuses on policy and diplomatic actions rather than the discursive construction of Türkiye's stance on Gaza and Palestine. This leaves an opening for research that investigates how these

diplomatic efforts are framed rhetorically within Türkiye's political institutions and how national identity and legitimacy are discursively negotiated in public rhetoric.

Despite the growing body of research on Erdoğan's rhetoric and Turkish foreign policy narratives, there is a notable absence of analyses focusing on the debates within the Turkish Parliament (TBMM). This gap is surprising given that parliamentary debates are key moments where political actors publicly negotiate and perform multiple dimensions of national identity and foreign policy stance.

Moreover, most existing research centers on speeches by Erdoğan or other executive figures, with limited attention to how discourse evolves dynamically in legislative settings or varies between branches of government. This lack of institutional and situational diversity is an important shortcoming, especially when considering recent and consequential developments in Türkiye's policy toward Palestine. To address this gap, the present study examines how President Erdoğan and political actors in the TBMM frame the Palestinian question in their public discourse following the Gaza War of October 7, 2023.

2.3. Media Representations of Türkiye's Role

Although this study focuses primarily on political discourse within institutional settings, existing scholarship on media representations of Türkiye's role in the Palestinian question offers valuable contextual insight. Research on how the media portrays Türkiye's involvement in the Palestinian cause has shown how such representations shape public opinion, political identity, and foreign policy narratives. Earlier studies mostly looked at how Turkish state media supported the government's stance, often highlighting Türkiye's solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Scholars argue that media representations often reflect divergent geopolitical interests and ideological alignments, resulting in portrayals of Türkiye as either a champion of Palestinian rights or a self-interested actor leveraging the issue for political gain (Yilmaz, 2024)

CDA has proven useful in examining how Turkish media construct political narratives, particularly during moments of international crisis. Alatas & Qorib (2025) applied CDA to *Hürriyet.com*'s coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian war, revealing a tendency to mirror official government rhetoric. Their findings show that the media often highlights Erdoğan's leadership, humanitarian aid to Gaza, and Türkiye's role in international forums like the OIC. These portrayals present Türkiye as a regional power committed to justice and protecting Muslims (Mengüaslan, 2024). In doing so, the media strengthens national pride and helps Türkiye build soft power abroad. However, given the increasingly centralized and pro-government nature of Turkish media, such representations should be critically examined, which can limit pluralistic narratives and lead to the obscuring of different perspectives.

Outside Türkiye, the way media outlets report on its foreign policy can vary widely. Turkish media usually frames the conflict in a nationalistic way, presenting Türkiye as an active and moral actor. In contrast, many Western media sources describe Türkiye's actions as being driven by domestic politics or opportunism. While Arslan (2024) suggests that such portrayals reflect broader political interests and biases, it is important to recognize that media bias is not exclusive to international outlets. Domestic media in Türkiye, particularly those aligned with the government, also construct selective narratives that serve political ends. This divergence in coverage underscores the need for a critical approach to discourse analysis one that accounts for how different media ecosystems shape public understanding of foreign policy. It also reinforces the value of this thesis's dataset, which focuses on institutional discourse rather than media representation, allowing for a more direct analysis of how political actors themselves frame Türkiye's role. Other studies have looked at how images and visuals are used in Turkish foreign policy, especially around the Palestinian question. These visual strategies also help shape how Türkiye's identity is constructed and how its foreign policy is understood (Arı & Sultan, 2020).

Media framing theory helps explain how different narratives are created depending on what is emphasized or left out. By focusing on certain aspects, such as humanitarian aid or political motives, media outlets shape how Türkiye's role is perceived, both at home and abroad (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Scheufele, 1999). In this context, Turkish political actors and media use symbolic acts and strategic language to reinforce the idea of Türkiye as a regional leader. Erdoğan's emotional speeches and strong criticism of Israel, often repeated by pro-government media, help build the image of Türkiye as a protector of Muslims in the region (Arı & Sultan, 2020). These strategies not only support domestic political goals but also strengthen Türkiye's influence on the global stage.

This study builds on the themes outlined above by examining the use of Critical Discourse Analysis in studies of MENA region leaders, executive discourse in Türkiye, and media representations of Türkiye's role in the Palestinian question, and extends this scholarship by analyzing post-October 7 multi-actor discourse, thereby addressing a gap in the literature on recent political communication about Palestine.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study, which combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Framing Theory, and theories of political instrumentalization and hegemony. These perspectives provide the conceptual tools to analyze how Turkish political actors construct the Gaza conflict in discourse, and how these framings work to produce ideological effects, legitimize certain political positions, and marginalize others. Together, these theories allow for an in-depth, critical interpretation of how language is used not only to describe but also to shape political reality in the context of the Gaza war.

3.1. Framing theory

Framing theory was first developed by Erving Goffman, who described frames as mental structures that help people make sense of what's happening around them. These frames guide how individuals recognize, interpret, and respond to events in everyday life (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). While Goffman's approach was rooted in everyday interaction and micro-sociology, his conceptualization laid the groundwork for later scholars to explore how frames operate in media and political discourse. Building on this foundation, Entman (1993) and others have adapted framing theory to examine how political actors strategically construct meaning, promote specific interpretations, and guide public understanding of complex events.

Framing theory provides a foundational lens for analyzing how language and communication shape public understanding of political issues. While CDA emphasizes how language enacts and reproduces power relations (Fairclough, 1995, p. 2), framing theory focuses on the strategic construction of meaning specifically, how certain interpretations of political events are promoted while others are marginalized (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Van Gorp, 2006, p. 66). Frames function by selectively emphasizing

particular aspects of a situation, guiding perception and interpretation through processes of inclusion and exclusion.

In political discourse, framing serves as a mechanism for diagnosing problems, attributing responsibility, making moral evaluations, and proposing solutions (Entman, 1993, p. 52; Gamson, 1992, pp. 31–33; Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199; Iyengar, 1991, p. 11). Political actors use frames not only to communicate their worldview but also to legitimize policy decisions, mobilize support, and shape collective identities. Gamson & Modigliani (1989) suggest that public discourse is shaped through symbolic frameworks that combine language, imagery, and recurring expressions. These frameworks often conveyed through what they term “media packages” help audiences interpret complex issues by embedding meaning in familiar cultural and emotional cues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). In the context of this study, such symbolic framing is evident in the way Turkish political figures, particularly President Erdoğan, construct narratives around the Gaza conflict. Through the use of evocative metaphors, religious references, and nationalist slogans, these actors craft a discursive environment that positions Gaza not only as a humanitarian concern but also as a site of moral and political significance.

This study applies framing theory to examine how President Erdoğan and other Turkish political actors have portrayed the Gaza conflict. It explores how Gaza is framed as a moral crisis, a national concern, and a symbol of broader geopolitical struggles. The analysis also considers competing narratives for instance, the AKP’s use of Islamic solidarity frames versus the opposition’s emphasis on human rights and intersectional concerns. These contrasts illuminate how different actors vie for discursive authority and seek to define the meaning and stakes of the conflict.

However, while framing theory explains how issues are constructed through language, it does not fully account for the strategic timing or emotional resonance of specific frames. To address this limitation, the study draws on literature concerning the political instrumentalization of symbolic issues. Edelman (1993) highlights how emotionally charged symbols are used to evoke public support and simplify complex

political realities a dynamic evident in Erdoğan's use of religious and humanitarian language to frame the Gaza conflict (p. 232). Chouliaraki (2013) adds that moral appeals can produce hierarchies of suffering, legitimizing selective solidarity a pattern reflected in Türkiye's prioritization of Palestinian suffering while sidelining other regional crises (p. 26-27). Dan et al. (2019) further demonstrate how symbolic framing aligns international events with domestic political interests, offering a lens through which to understand how the Gaza conflict is discursively mobilized to reinforce national identity, political legitimacy, and ideological alignment (p. 151).

Moreover, the strategic use of framing is closely tied to audience reception. As Reese et al., (2001) note, frames are not only constructed by elites but also interpreted and contested by audiences, making framing a dynamic and dialogic process (p. 11). This is particularly relevant in polarized political contexts, where competing frames reflect broader ideological divisions and struggles for legitimacy.

3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

While framing theory helps identify how Erdoğan constructs the Palestinian question through emotionally resonant narratives, this study also examines how these frames operate within broader structures of power and ideology. Emerging from the work of Norman Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2013) and other scholars such as van Dijk (1998), Wodak (2015), and Chouliaraki (1999), CDA investigates the relationship between language, power, and ideology. It treats language not as a neutral vehicle of communication but as a social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations in society. Michel Foucault (1972) made discourse a central focus in the social sciences, highlighting how language shapes and reveals social relations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 28). Rather than viewing texts as neutral, this perspective sees them as active participants in constructing social realities.

CDA's critical edge lies in its attention to the ideological and political dimensions of language. It focuses on how discourse sustains or contests power

relations and how dominant ideologies are naturalized through everyday talk, media, and political communication (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 2-3; van Dijk, 1998, p. 2). Fairclough (1989, p.2; 1995, p. 27) argues that ideology works by embedding itself in everyday language use, especially in ways that are taken for granted and go unquestioned. The effect is a form of “ideological common sense” that helps maintain existing power structures. This study applies CDA to examine how political discourse constructs ideological meaning in moments of international crisis. Specifically, it investigates how President Erdoğan’s rhetoric surrounding the Gaza war. Drawing on familiar discursive tropes such as national unity, historical solidarity, and moral positioning to produce and legitimize particular interpretations of the conflict. These discursive patterns will be analyzed to understand how language functions as a tool of ideological reproduction and political positioning. Van Dijk (1998) further develops this by linking ideology to *social cognition* the mental frameworks people use to understand the world. He describes ideologies as structured sets of beliefs that shape how groups perceive each other and themselves. These shared mental models inform not just how people speak and write, but also how they interpret texts and events. In this sense, political discourse is both shaped by ideology and a tool for reproducing it.

Additionally, Althusser (1971) and Pêcheux (1982) offer insight into how individuals are positioned in discourse. Althusser’s concept of *interpellation* suggests that individuals are “hailed” into particular subject positions through language. Pêcheux expands this by arguing that individuals misrecognize these positions as natural, rather than ideological. Erdoğan’s use of pronouns like “we” or labels like “oppressor” and “resister” not only names political positions but also constitutes subjects who embody those roles (Fairclough, 1995, p. 40).

To apply CDA the study uses Norman Fairclough’s (1989, 1992, 1995) framework as a guiding model. Fairclough offers a way to understand how language is shaped by and helps shape broader social and political realities (Fairclough, 1989: Wodak & Meyer, 2015). His model works across three dimensions. First, the textual level involves analyzing language features such as word choice, grammar, modality,

and cohesion. For example, when looking at Erdoğan's speeches, this might involve identifying emotionally charged terms, evaluative statements, or how agency is distributed through pronoun use. Experiential values reflect how word choices encode a speaker's view of the world and social relationships, what kinds of actions are named, what roles are assigned, and what is foregrounded or omitted. This helps uncover how Erdoğan linguistically frames events and responsibilities in ideologically loaded ways. Expressive values, meanwhile, convey the speaker's attitudes, evaluations, and emotional positioning. These are not just stylistic choices but ideologically significant markers that align the speaker with or against particular values, social groups, or actions. For example, Erdoğan's use of morally charged terms like "oppressors" or "martyrs" emotionally positions both himself and his audience in relation to the Gaza conflict (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 112–119).

The second stage, discursive practice, is concerned with the processes of production and interpretation of texts. This involves examining how Erdoğan's speeches and parliamentary debates draw on recognizable linguistic and rhetorical repertoires, such as nationalist, religious, or anti-imperialist language, that make them understandable to both political actors and audiences. At this level, the focus is not only on what is said, but on how meaning is constructed through intertextuality, conventions of political speech, and the shared background knowledge of participants. In other words, discursive practice highlights how discourse becomes intelligible and persuasive within specific institutional and cultural settings.

The third stage, social practice, shifts the analysis from interpretation to explanation. Here the emphasis is on connecting those discourses to the wider ideological and structural context of Turkish society and global politics. This means asking how Erdoğan's framings reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies, such as nationalism, religious solidarity, or Türkiye's regional role, and how they contribute to maintaining or contesting power relations. Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) understanding of hegemony, this level shows how repeated rhetorical strategies can normalize particular worldviews and marginalize alternatives. In this way, the social practice stage situates individual texts within broader struggles over legitimacy, identity, and authority. This level is especially important in relation to what Gramsci

(1971) theorised as hegemony: the ability to lead through consent rather than coercion by shaping what appears as natural, inevitable, or morally right. Discourse plays a key role in maintaining hegemony by making certain ways of thinking and speaking seem “common sense,” while excluding others. As Fairclough (1995) notes, hegemonic power limits the range of acceptable discourse by making particular articulations dominant and durable (p. 74). In Erdoğan’s case, his reuse of nationalist and religious language allows him to present political claims, even contradictory ones as morally grounded and culturally authentic. Likewise, certain ideas, such as motherhood as national duty or Türkiye’s moral leadership in the Muslim world are made to seem ‘natural’ through repetition, symbolic references, and emotional appeals. These ideas persist not because they are empirically true, but because they are discursively secured through hegemonic processes.

Applying this tripartite framework to Erdoğan’s discourse is particularly effective for unpacking the ideological complexity of his post 7th of October speeches on Gaza. First, it allows for a systematic reading of his language, not merely what is said, but how it is constructed, and what political work it does. Second, it facilitates engagement with underlying ideological currents. Fairclough’s (1989) concept of Members’ Resources is especially helpful here, as it highlights how Erdoğan’s discourse activates shared historical and cultural knowledge to construct a sense of collective identity and urgency (p. 25).

Moreover, analyzing multiple layers of meaning, from individual speech acts (such as calls for unity or condemnation) to broader discursive structures helps illuminate Erdoğan’s rhetorical strategy. This includes how he assigns roles to Türkiye, the West, Palestine, and Israel, and how he uses repetition, coherence, and framing to produce emotionally charged and politically persuasive narratives. Finally, Fairclough’s emphasis on analyst reflexivity is crucial, particularly given the sensitive and polarized nature of the Gaza conflict.

3.3. Theoretical Integration

The conceptual framework interacts throughout the analysis, providing a layered and interdisciplinary understanding of how the Palestinian question is framed in Turkish

political discourse following the Gaza conflict. Framing theory helps identify the specific ways in which the government constructs meanings around Gaza as a moral crisis, a national concern, or a geopolitical struggle. Political instrumentalization theory then explains why these frames are strategically deployed, showing how the issue becomes a political resource to consolidate power, legitimize authority, and manage both domestic and international audiences. Finally, CDA offers tools to unpack the underlying power relations and ideological agendas embedded in these frames, revealing how language functions not only to represent reality but to actively shape it. Together, these concepts allow the study to move beyond viewing political discourse as mere rhetoric, instead treating it as a dynamic site of political negotiation, contestation, and identity formation.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

This research is a qualitative study rooted in an exploratory approach, designed to examine how the Turkish government has framed the Palestinian question in its political discourse following the Gaza War of October 7, 2023. Rather than testing fixed hypotheses, the study adopts a flexible, open-ended inquiry into how meaning is constructed and circulated through language in political settings. At the center of the analysis is the discourse of President Erdoğan, whose public speeches and statements shape how the conflict is understood both within Türkiye and internationally. His role as the country's key political figure makes his discourse a crucial site for examining how national and international narratives were constructed around the Palestinian question.

To explore how Erdoğan's framings are received, contested, or strategically adapted within Türkiye's broader political arena, the study also analyzes debates from the TBMM. These debates are used as complementary material to assess how different political actors engage with Erdoğan's rhetoric, whether they reinforce his framing, challenge it, or introduce alternative narratives that serve their own political agendas. This approach allows the study to identify points of convergence and tension within the Turkish political discourse on Palestine.

To investigate this, the study applies CDA as its main analytical tool. CDA facilitates a close reading of political texts, including speeches, statements, and parliamentary records, and is well-suited to uncovering how power, ideology, and identity are embedded in language. In this study, Framing Theory is used to explore how Erdoğan and other political actors selectively emphasize, interpret, and morally evaluate specific aspects of the Gaza conflict to construct particular understandings of the situation. Drawing on a critical discourse analytical approach, the study treats

framing as a form of discursive construction meaning that frames do not simply reflect reality but actively shape it through language. This involves highlighting certain actors, causes, and values while downplaying or omitting others. In addition, the concept of political instrumentalization is applied to examine how these discursive frames are mobilized to serve broader domestic and geopolitical interests. Together, these frameworks help illuminate not only what is being communicated, but also the strategic and political effects of these discursive choices how they construct the image of Israel and Palestine, define Türkiye's global role, and appeal to different audiences at home and abroad.

This study adopts a social constructivist epistemology, which holds that political realities such as conflict, diplomacy, and national interest are not objective or given, but are actively constructed through discourse (Gergen, 1999; Pernecky, 2016). In the context of Erdoğan's discourse on the Gaza conflict, this perspective enables a critical interrogation of how meaning is produced, contested, and strategically deployed in political communication.

Rather than treating Erdoğan's statements as neutral reflections of policy, the research approaches them as performative acts that shape public understanding, legitimize political positions, and negotiate Türkiye's identity on both domestic and international stages (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2015). This constructivist stance problematizes the notion of political authority and national interest by asking: *Whose narratives dominate? What rhetorical strategies are used to assert legitimacy? And how do other political actors respond or resist these constructions?*

A qualitative approach is essential for this study because the research problem centers on the interpretation of political discourse specifically, how President Erdoğan frames the Gaza conflict and how other actors in the Turkish parliament respond, contest, or reframe that narrative. Since the aim is to uncover the meanings, strategies, and rhetorical choices embedded in speech, qualitative methods offer the necessary tools to analyze language in its political and social context (Mason, 2002). Rather than measuring frequency or sentiment, this approach enables a close reading of discourse as a site of meaning-making, power negotiation, and identity construction.

Given the dynamic and politically charged nature of the Gaza conflict, Turkish

political actors continuously adapt their rhetorical strategies in response to unfolding events and each other's statements. Because this study investigates how Erdoğan frames the conflict and how other actors contest or reframe that narrative, an exploratory design is especially appropriate. It allows for close attention if there is a shift in discourse over time, without imposing rigid analytical categories from the outset.

To capture this variation, five key political moments were selected for analysis: Erdoğan's immediate reaction on the 7th of October, his response to the hospital bombing, the Great Palestine Rally in Istanbul, the OIC summit, and his speech at the UN General Assembly. Each event reflects a distinct rhetorical context, allowing the study to trace how framing strategies evolve across different audiences and political stages. Through repeated close readings of these speeches and related parliamentary debates, analytical categories such as religious framing, humanitarian appeals, anti-Western rhetoric, and calls for national unity were developed inductively, based on recurring patterns and contrasts in the discourse (Mason, 2002, p. 180).

By combining CDA with an inductive methodology and an interpretive lens informed by framing theory, the study is able to answer the research question in depth showing not only what has been said by Turkish government actors after October 7, but also how these framings function to advance particular ideologies, maintain hegemonic positions, and strategically navigate political tensions.

4.2. Data and Methods

4.2.1. Data Collection and Sampling

This study focuses on political texts and official discourse produced by Turkish government actors from October 2023 through September 2024. The starting point is the outbreak of the Gaza War on 7 October 2023, which marked a sudden and significant escalation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, triggering strong political reactions both domestically and internationally. This one-year period allows for a detailed examination of how the Turkish government responded through speeches, parliamentary debates, and symbolic gestures, and how its framing of the conflict

evolved over time.

The end date is set just before President Erdoğan's formal announcement in November 2024 that Türkiye had severed all diplomatic ties with Israel (Soylu, 2024). While some trade restrictions were imposed earlier in May 2024, the full diplomatic break remains contested and unfolded gradually (Walsh, 2024). By concluding the data collection in September, the study avoids incorporating the fallout from this rupture, which introduced new dynamics beyond the scope of this thesis.

Moreover, this time frame captures a period of regional fluidity, including shifting alliances and developments in Syria that significantly influenced Türkiye–Israel relations. As tensions escalated over competing interests in Syrian particularly regarding Kurdish autonomy and Iranian influence Türkiye's foreign policy rhetoric became increasingly assertive (Al Habtoor Research Centre, 2025). These broader geopolitical shifts provide essential context for understanding the discursive strategies employed by Turkish political actors during the Gaza conflict, without extending into the post-break recalibration phase.

The primary data for this study consists of political discourse produced in response to the 2023 Gaza conflict, with a focus on President Erdoğan and members of the TBMM. These sources were selected to capture both personalized leadership rhetoric and institutional responses, allowing for a comparative analysis of framing strategies across different political actors. Due to the exploratory aims of this study, purposive sampling (Emmel, 2013, p. 33) was used to select significant discursive instances where the Palestinian question was framed in especially salient, symbolic, or contested ways. The focus is on how government discourse constructs meaning, identity, and political positioning in the context of an ongoing international crisis.

The dataset includes: six public speeches delivered by President Erdoğan between 7 October 2023 and 24 September 2024, obtained from the official website¹ of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye.¹ These speeches correspond to key political moments: the initial reaction to the conflict, the bombing of the Al-Ahli hospital, the Great Palestine Rally in Istanbul, the OIC summit, and the UN General Assembly address. Two social media posts from Erdoğan's verified X (formerly

¹ <https://tccb.gov.tr/>

Twitter) account, selected for their immediate and symbolic framing of the conflict. This study employs a purposive, event-based sampling strategy, focusing on five key political moments between October 2023 and September 2024. These events were selected because they represent instances where Turkish government discourse on the Palestinian question may have shifted in response to varying audiences: domestic, regional, international. The aim is to examine how and whether such discursive shifts occur, rather than presuming them in advance. By focusing on politically significant moments with distinct settings and audience contexts, the study can capture how Türkiye's official narrative was actively renegotiated in light of changing pressures and opportunities, in line with the principles of Critical Discourse studies (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 6) . The discursive trajectory initiated on 7th of October 2023, following the Hamas attacks, laid the foundation for Türkiye's moral and geopolitical framing of the conflict. In his early statements, President Erdoğan emphasized solidarity with Palestinians and condemned the violence, establishing a rhetorical tone that would be echoed in subsequent political moments. This continuity was particularly evident during the 28 October "Great Palestine Rally" in Istanbul, where expressions of national identity and regional solidarity were intertwined in a symbolic gesture marking the centennial of the Turkish Republic.

A notable shift occurred on the 18th of October, following the bombing of Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza. The incident intensified humanitarian framing within Turkish political discourse, and the government's declaration of a national mourning day signaled a move from strategic alignment toward moral urgency. This rupture introduced a more emotionally charged and ethically framed narrative.

Subsequent events, including the 11 November OIC-Arab League Emergency Summit and the 24 September 2024 UN General Assembly speech, reflect a return to discursive continuity. In these settings, Türkiye reaffirmed its leadership role within the Islamic world and sought to shape global narratives around the conflict, reinforcing earlier themes of moral responsibility and regional solidarity.

A circular and iterative approach was employed to construct the dataset. The process began with the identification of presidential speeches from the official website of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye covering the period from 7 October 2023

to 1 October 2024. Using Turkish-language keywords such as “*Filistin*” (Palestine) and “*Gazze*” (Gaza), the search was filtered under the category “*Konuřmalar*” (Speeches), yielding a total of 63 records.

Each speech was subjected to close reading, and a preliminary selection of 18 speeches was made based on the presence and depth of references to the Palestinian question. It was observed that in domestic settings, President Erdoğan’s rhetoric remained relatively consistent, often repeating key themes with heightened emotional tone. In contrast, speeches delivered in international forums exhibited notable shifts in framing and strategic emphasis. Based on this observation, the sample was further refined to six speeches that represented diverse settings and rhetorical variations, allowing for a comparative analysis of discursive shifts across contexts.

To complement the executive discourse, 10 parliamentary debates were collected from the official website² of the Turkish Grand National Assembly specifically from the “*Tutanaklar*” (Documents) and then “*Tutanak metinleri*” (Verbatim records (in Turkish)). For each selected presidential speech, the closest parliamentary sessions were identified, and keyword searches were conducted using terms relevant to the specific events, including “*Filistin*,” (Palestine”) “*Gazze*,” (Gaza) “*El-Ehli Hastanesi*,” (Al Ahli hospital) “*İslam İşbirliđi Teřkilatı*” (OIC) “*Miting*”(rally) and “*Birleřmiř Milletler Teřkilatı*” (United Nations). These keywords were adapted to reflect the thematic focus of each moment. All relevant contributions by parliamentarians were included for analysis, regardless of party affiliation, to ensure a comprehensive view of how Erdoğan’s framing was received, contested, or repurposed within the legislative context.

In addition to the primary dataset of government statements, a third layer of material drawn from Turkish and international media coverage was used to contextualize the selection and relevance of specific framings. This media content was not analyzed systematically as a separate dataset, nor was it used to assess public perception. Rather, it served a situational and justificatory function: media sources were consulted to identify moments of heightened discursive salience (e.g., widespread coverage of the Al-Ahli hospital bombing) or to provide background on parliamentary

² <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/>

debates and political developments. In this way, media coverage helped establish the broader political and communicative environment in which selected government framings were produced and circulated.

4.2.2. Analytical Framework and Strategy

Analytically, the study draws on Framing Theory and Political Instrumentalisation to examine how political actors construct and deploy interpretive frames that define problems, assign responsibility, and mobilize support for specific political agendas. These frames are understood as strategic communicative tools shaped by domestic and international political goals.

The analysis applies Fairclough's CDA (1989, 1995). The first phase involves close textual analysis of Erdoğan's corpus. The second phase introduces cross-case comparisons, either across actors (e.g., Erdoğan vs. parliamentary voices) or across events, to track discursive shifts and strategic reframing.

4.2.3. Data Analysis

The selected texts were analyzed using a qualitative, manual coding strategy informed by principles of CDA and frame analysis (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008). A coding table was developed to systematically record and compare discursive elements across speeches and parliamentary statements. Each text was assigned a unique identifier (Text ID), corresponding to the event and date of delivery.

During close reading, recurring keywords and phrases were extracted and recorded, alongside observations on tone, framing strategies, and ideological positioning. Particular attention was paid to shifts in rhetorical style and emphasis, especially across different settings (e.g., domestic vs. international). Frames were identified inductively through initial readings, allowing dominant narratives to emerge organically from the material. These included themes such as religious solidarity, humanitarian appeals, anti-Western rhetoric, and national pride.

The coding process enabled the identification of patterns in how political meaning was constructed, contested, and deployed. Drawing on CDA, the analysis

focused on how language functioned as a tool of power legitimizing policy positions, constructing collective identities, and negotiating Türkiye's role in regional and global contexts. This interpretive approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how government discourse operated within broader ideological and strategic frameworks.

4.3. Limitations and Reflexivity

As an Azerbaijani researcher fluent in Turkish, I bring significant cultural and linguistic familiarity to Turkish political discourse. This background enables me to grasp subtle meanings, metaphors, and shifts in tone that might escape non-native speakers. Such “insider” knowledge enriches interpretation but also carries the risk of bias (Yip, 2023). My engagement with the Palestinian cause is both personal and political. I began this research out of a deep concern for what I view as a genocide unfolding in Gaza, and a growing frustration with the contradictions in Türkiye's official stance a rhetoric of solidarity that often clashes with its political actions. These convictions have shaped my motivation, but I have been mindful of their potential influence on analysis. To address this, I practiced reflexivity throughout the study: regularly questioning my interpretations, grounding findings in direct textual evidence, and discussing emerging insights with colleagues to challenge assumptions. Reflexivity is widely recognized as essential in qualitative research for acknowledging and managing the researcher's influence on analysis (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

One key limitation is that the analysis focuses primarily on a specific set of government-produced texts: speeches, statements, and parliamentary debates, which means the findings reflect how state actors frame the Palestinian question, rather than how these framings are received or contested by the public. Nonetheless, this focus remains analytically valuable, as it captures the official discourse that shapes public narratives and policy directions.

Another limitation concerns the selection of data, which was shaped by political salience and discursive richness. This inevitably introduces a degree of subjectivity in determining which events and texts were most relevant. However, this selective approach allows for a deeper engagement with texts that are rhetorically and ideologically dense, offering rich insights into the strategic use of language. While I

aimed for diversity in audience, setting, and rhetorical context, the limited number of texts may exclude other relevant framings that circulated during the same period. Still, the sample provides a sufficiently varied corpus to trace dominant patterns and shifts in framing across different contexts and moments.

Language and translation posed a real challenge throughout the research process. Since most of the material was originally in Turkish, I translated all texts myself. As a fluent Turkish speaker, I was familiar with the rhetorical style, but even so, I often found it difficult to capture the full emotional weight, cultural nuance, and layered meanings, especially in speeches by President Erdoğan, who frequently uses proverbs, religious references, and complex idiomatic expressions that don't have direct equivalents in English. While every effort was made to preserve rhetorical tone and ideological nuance, some subtleties may inevitably have been lost or transformed in translation. This is particularly relevant for texts that rely heavily on metaphor, irony, or intertextual religious language. I made sure the translations were as accurate as possible and added explanations when needed, so the meaning and analysis stayed the same.

The analysis is temporally bounded, covering the period between October 2023 and September 2024. This timeframe captures the initial and evolving stages of Türkiye's discursive response to the Gaza conflict, particularly through official statements and political rhetoric. It does not account for potential future shifts in discourse or policy, and the findings should be understood as situated within this specific geopolitical and historical moment.

While the study draws on Fairclough's CDA as its core analytical tool, it does not aim to fully map the institutional complexities or policy mechanisms of Turkish foreign relations. Nor does it include interviews or direct access to the intentions of political actors. The analysis therefore focuses on discourse on what is said, how it is said, and what ideological work it performs rather than speculating on internal motivations or policy outcomes. It offers one entry point into how language contributes to meaning-making, identity construction, and political positioning during moments of international crisis.

5. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents an empirical analysis of how the Turkish government, led by President Erdoğan, framed the Palestinian question in the immediate aftermath of the 7th of October 2023 escalation in Gaza. By examining a series of key political events including Erdoğan's speeches and parliamentary debates in the TBMM the chapter traces how the conflict was discursively constructed and mobilized to serve various political, ideological, and geopolitical objectives.

Following the approach common in Critical Discourse Analysis, the findings are presented together with discussion. This means that each data excerpt is interpreted straight away, linking patterns in language and themes to the wider political and discursive context as the analysis develops.

The analysis proceeds event by event, combining initial close readings with thematic interpretation. It was observed early on that Erdoğan's rhetoric shifts notably depending on his audience and the context in which his speeches are delivered, reflecting a calibrated strategy of communication. The chapter's structure therefore begins with a detailed analysis of Erdoğan's speeches, highlighting his framing strategies, before moving to an analysis of the TBMM debates. These debates serve as a critical counterpoint, revealing a broader, pluralistic and often contentious discourse in Türkiye's political landscape. Together, these empirical sources allow for a detailed examination of how language, tone, and framing operate across multiple sites to construct narratives about the Gaza war, assign blame, define identities, and legitimize policy responses.

5.1. Immediate Official Reactions

This section examines the Turkish government's initial political discourse responses to the Gaza War of October 7, 2023, through two key speeches by President Erdoğan

delivered within a two-day span. The first of these took place at the 4th Extraordinary Grand Congress of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) on October 7, 2023. This event was of great political significance as it marked his unanimous re-election as party chairman and the consolidation of his leadership position ahead of a critical period for both Türkiye and the region. The congress, held in Ankara, was not only an important intra-party event, but also a platform for Erdoğan to address acute regional crises, in particular the unfolding conflict in the Gaza Strip, which began on the same day, October 7. The second speech took place at the opening ceremony of the Mor Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Church on October 8.

The inauguration of the Mor Ephrem Syriac Orthodox Church was a historically significant moment, marking the first newly constructed church in Türkiye in over a century. The event drew attention both domestically and internationally, not only for its symbolic value but also for the political messaging embedded within it (France 24, 2023). In this case, the opening of a Christian church allowed him to project an image of religious tolerance and pluralism. His decision to speak about the Gaza conflict during this ceremony was likely strategic: it positioned Türkiye as a moral actor defending oppressed communities, regardless of faith, and reinforced his government's alignment with the Palestinian cause. The timing just one day after the outbreak of the war and the choice of venue suggest a deliberate effort to connect domestic symbolism with international crisis.

President Erdoğan's response to the escalation in Gaza, as evident in his speeches since the October 7th, 2023, demonstrates a subtle and strategically multi-layered use of political rhetoric. Erdoğan's language revealed to be operated on multiple levels to foster legitimacy, shape identities, and address the sensitivities of a changing geopolitical landscape.

5.1.2 Türkiye as a regional power and mediator

In his October 7th and 8th of October remarks, Erdoğan's response was measured: he avoided openly allying with either side while subtly reinforcing Türkiye's traditional pro-Palestinian stance. Erdoğan positions Türkiye as a decisive actor committed both to fighting terrorism ("while decisively continuing the fight against terrorism") and promoting peace, stability, and justice in the broader region. He avoids naming either Hamas or the nature of the attacks, instead referring vaguely to "the incidents that occurred". This highlights the strategic ambiguity of Erdoğan's discourse, which is sympathetic to the Palestinian resistance, critical of Israel's actions, but cautious about directly supporting violence. This phrasing deliberately abstracts from the concrete details of the violence and reinforces Türkiye's image as a neutral mediator (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001). Erdoğan's call for restraint ("itidalle hareket etmek") and his warning against "impulsive actions that would further heighten the conflict" construct Türkiye as a mediator rather than a partisan actor. His statement that "adding fuel to the fire... doesn't help anyone" universalizes blame and avoids direct attribution.

But this cautious framing is not typical of Erdoğan's more combative rhetoric in past crises. In earlier speeches, he has openly aligned with the Palestinian cause, referred to Hamas as "freedom fighters," and invoked Ottoman-era claims to Jerusalem. So why this shift? At the time, as later reports and analyses confirmed Türkiye was actively pursuing reconciliation with Israel (Orient XXI, 2024), Egypt (Apavia, 2025) and Gulf states (Washington, 2025) and had positioned itself as a key mediator in conflicts like Russia–Ukraine (Şafak, 2025), Ethiopia–Somalia (Şafak, 2025), and even prisoner exchanges involving the US and Russia ((Dhojnacki, 2024). A confrontational tone could have jeopardized these efforts.

This careful choice of words helps Türkiye maintain good diplomatic relationships with a wide range of groups, including Western countries, nearby neighbors, and Islamist movements. For example, openly condemning Hamas could harm Erdoğan's support among key groups at home and in the region, while showing too much support for Hamas might upset Western allies and make diplomatic efforts

in the Middle East more difficult. By abstracting from the violence and emphasizing moral leadership, Erdoğan frames Türkiye as a neutral and credible actor one capable of engaging all sides without alienating any (Entman, 2003, p. 30). This selective framing not only protects Türkiye's regional relationships but also justifies its interventions as peace-oriented and humanitarian.

Erdoğan's assertion that "we have never hesitated to speak the truth, even if it is painful" is more than rhetorical device. It's a deliberate move to claim moral authority and cast Türkiye as the lone voice willing to confront global hypocrisy particularly around Gaza. This kind of positioning has been observed in his UN speeches, where persuasive language and ideological appeals are used to elevate Türkiye's role as a moral authority to Western narratives (Sarwat et al., 2024).

5.1.3. Strategic Mediation: Between Western Norms and Islamic Solidarity

Religious symbolism plays a significant role in Erdoğan's discourse. He emphasizes Türkiye's duty to defend the "first qibla Al-Aqsa Mosque" and its "historical and religious status" against any attempts at "erosion" or "occupation." This symbolic language ties Türkiye's foreign policy to Islamic heritage, reinforcing both internal solidarity and a shared Muslim identity in the region. These expressions of solidarity resonate with Muslim audiences while maintaining a level of diplomatic formality. By portraying Türkiye as "the heir to the Ottomans" and the protector of Islamic holy sites, Erdoğan draws on nationalist, religious, and historical legitimacy. This framing is particularly effective in rallying support among Muslim communities by linking Türkiye's contemporary role to its Ottoman legacy and historic mission (Smith, 2009, p. 64). Such integration of history and religion into political discourse is consistent with Fairclough's notion that language constructs social identities and collective memory (Fairclough, 1995).

Moreover, Erdoğan appeals to international norms. His call for a two-state solution based on 1967 borders and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem reinforces Türkiye's formal foreign policy line. While the repeated emphasis on "just peace" and "preserving international law", situate Türkiye's stance within a legal and normative order that resonates with both domestic and international audiences. This approach aligns with Erdoğan's established discursive identity as a regional mediator who bridges Western norms and Islamic solidarity.

In the study, the term "Western norms" is understood as it functions within Erdoğan's own discourse rather than as a neutral geographical or cultural category. This study recognizes that "the West" is a contested and politically loaded concept within Turkish political rhetoric, reflecting Erdoğan's particular political and ideological framing.

5.1.4. Moral Authority Through Victimhood

A central feature of Erdoğan's rhetoric is the use of a victimization frame. Erdoğan's speeches frequently employ metaphors and emotionally charged language to highlight the suffering in the region. A prominent rhetorical device is the metaphor of "*spilled blood*", which evokes the tragedy of loss without explicitly assigning blame, allowing for a universal appeal. He also universalizes concern for Palestinian suffering by focusing on civilians especially children and infants, and vividly portraying their tragedy. Through expressions such as "the death of innocent children," he engages a moral-emotional register, constructing a narrative of shared humanitarian concern (Chouliaraki, 2013, p. 45). This strategy attempts to bring the audience into a position of empathy and, ultimately, political mobilization.

Erdoğan's repeated use of terms like "destruction," "usurpation," and "siege" casts Palestinians as the ultimate victims not just of military aggression, but of a long-standing civilizational injustice. This framing isn't just about condemning Israel; it's about constructing a symbolic battlefield where Türkiye stands as the moral protagonist. By emphasizing victimhood and invoking terms like "occupation" and "violation," Erdoğan is not only attributing blame to Israel he's also positioning

Türkiye as the inheritor of a historical and religious responsibility to defend the oppressed. Within the analytical framework of diagnosis and prognosis (Entman, 1993), this framing identifies the conflict primarily as a humanitarian crisis in urgent need of intervention, implicitly assigning responsibility to Israel and, through omission, the complicit West for sustaining the violence. While the universality of suffering creates a strong emotional appeal, it also limits the scope of action to the savior role that Erdoğan and, more broadly, Türkiye claim for themselves.

5.1.5. Selective Centrality: Framing Palestine as the Region's Core Conflict

Erdoğan's statement that "the root of all problems in our region lies in the Palestinian question" acts as a broad, selective frame. As he further emphasizes, "Lasting peace in the Middle East can only be achieved through a final resolution of the Palestine-Israel issue". By casting Palestine as the central conflict, he effectively sidelines other pressing regional issues such as Syria's civil war (Topcu & Solaker, 2024), the Kurdish struggle, and Roma marginalization in his own country (Eski et al., 2022).

Each of these conflicts carries political risk and domestic tension for Türkiye. Syria, for instance, has entangled Türkiye in a costly and unpopular refugee crisis, military operations, and complex diplomacy with Russia and Iran. Engaging with the Kurdish issue is politically risky and divisive. The Roma issue lacks political capital and international visibility. It doesn't mobilize Erdoğan's base or offer diplomatic leverage, making it easier to ignore. This streamlined storyline unites domestic audiences around a single cause while muting other crises. By elevating Palestine above these issues, Erdoğan is not just expressing solidarity he's strategically choosing a conflict that unites his domestic base, resonates across the Muslim world, and positions Türkiye as a moral leader in global diplomacy.

This selective prioritization allows him to project clarity and conviction abroad while avoiding the messier, more divisive conflicts at home. This rhetorical move simplifies the region's complexity in order to amplify Türkiye's role within it a classic example of strategic framing. As Entman (2003) explains, framing involves "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them

so as to promote a particular interpretation” (p. 148). Such selective emphasis and omission are central to how meaning is constructed and contested in political discourse.

5.1.6. The Grand National Assembly of Türkiye: Multiplying the Palestinian Frame Beyond Erdoğan

TBMM debates held on October 10³ and 11⁴, 2023, play a crucial role in understanding the broader discourse landscape in Türkiye following the eruption of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Unlike the more centralized and carefully calibrated executive narrative offered by President Erdoğan in his speeches on the October 7th and 8th, these parliamentary debates reveal a plurality of voices, attitudes, and framing strategies that articulate solidarity with Palestinians while also critiquing the government’s approach to the crisis.

While the session opens under the shared premise of opposition to Israeli attacks and solidarity with Palestinians, the speeches reveal distinct divergences in framing, ideological orientation, and political critique, especially toward the ruling AK Party and President Erdoğan’s policies.

Metaphoric expressions often dramatize the conflict as apocalyptic or existential: for instance, terms such as “kıyametin habercisi” (it means someone or something that signals or announces a coming disaster or catastrophic event) and declarations that the war threatens “the bleeding wounds of the Middle East” appear repeatedly. Across the political spectrum, many speakers in the TBMM used evocative terms such as “oppressed,” “genocide,” and “occupier” to characterize Israeli policies and actions. While these terms appeared in speeches from both government and opposition parties, their rhetorical function varied with some invoking them to express humanitarian outrage, and others using them to critique Erdoğan’s foreign policy positioning or assert alternative visions of solidarity. The term “massacre” punctuates

³ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23928>

⁴ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23930>

speeches regularly, and Gaza is metaphorized as an “open-air prison,” vividly capturing both physical confinement and political isolation. This strong imagery dramatizes the humanitarian crisis and reinforces the narrative of Palestinian victimhood.

Party affiliations strongly align with distinct rhetorical styles and framing tendencies. The AKP, alongside its nationalist and Islamist allies including the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and HÜDA PAR tend to emphasize themes of religious solidarity and civilizational struggle. Religious and national symbols prominently shaped their discourse. The Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi), a former ally of the AKP and now an Islamist-conservative opposition party, similarly invokes moral and religious language, though often with a more traditionalist tone and occasional critiques of the government’s foreign policy position. References to “Jerusalem,” “Al-Aqsa Mosque,” and Türkiye’s role as “heir to the Ottomans” evoke shared cultural and historical heritage, legitimizing claims of Türkiye’s leadership in the Muslim world.

Looking at how different actors in parliament responded to the events of 7 October, it’s clear that many framed the conflict in ways that go beyond just condemning Israel. For instance, Mehmet Akif Yılmaz (AKP) places full responsibility on Israel, saying, “There is no Palestinian question in the Middle East... there is an Israeli issue.” This framing shifts the focus entirely onto Israel and erases any complexity around Palestinian agency. It’s similar to Erdoğan’s approach, where he emphasizes Israeli aggression but avoids mentioning Hamas directly especially in his immediate speeches after the attacks. Yılmaz’s statement feels like an extension of that, but blunt.

Faruk Dinç from HÜDA PAR takes it even further. He openly praises the “the warriors of the Aqsa Flood” and calls Israel a “Zionist terrorist organization.” This kind of language not only endorses armed resistance but also positions Hamas as a legitimate actor in the struggle. What’s interesting here is the timing: while Erdoğan avoids naming Hamas right away, Dinç and others are quick to praise them. That contrast suggests different strategic priorities. Erdoğan seems to be balancing international

diplomacy with domestic sentiment, whereas HÜDA PAR leans into ideological alignment and religious solidarity.

So even though they're all condemning Israel, the frames they use reveal different political positions. AKP figures echo Erdoğan's civilizational framing but stay within the bounds of state rhetoric. HÜDA PAR, on the other hand, uses the Palestinian cause to assert a more radical, Islamist identity. In that sense, the Palestinian question becomes a kind of discursive space where parties project their own values and compete over what solidarity should look like.

Opposition parties, especially the pro-Kurdish Green Left Party (Yeşil Sol), adopt a markedly different rhetorical and political stance compared to the ruling bloc. Their language is sharper, more universalist, and explicitly critical of the government's foreign policy. Figures like Sırrı Sakık and Ömer Faruk Hülakü link the Palestinian struggle to Kurdish repression in Türkiye and Syria, accusing the government of "double standards" and an "oath of silence." When they say, "The Kurdish issue and the Palestinian question are fraternal problems. Peace will not come to the Middle East until these issues are resolved," they're not just expressing solidarity they're reframing Türkiye's role from mediator to complicit actor. This directly counters Erdoğan's claim that "lasting peace in the Middle East is only possible with a final solution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue". The opposition's framing expands the scope of peace beyond the Israeli-Palestinian binary and demands consistency in Türkiye's human rights discourse.

This contrast is politically significant. While Erdoğan positions Türkiye as a moral leader and potential mediator, the Green Left Party exposes the contradictions in that narrative especially in light of Türkiye's military operations in Rojava (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Their critique points to a selective reading of violence: what Israel does in Gaza is condemned as "genocide," while Turkish airstrikes on Kurdish regions are framed as security measures. This is where the political instrumentalization lens becomes crucial. Türkiye's solidarity with Palestine is not applied universally; it's mobilized selectively to reinforce national identity and regional influence, while

Kurdish resistance is delegitimized and criminalized. The difference lies in who is allowed to be a “victim” and who is cast as a “threat.”

Their demand to cancel trade agreements with Israel also introduces a material dimension to this criticism. It’s the first time in the debates that economic ties are directly challenged. This stands in contrast to AKP-allied parties like HÜDA PAR, who vocally support Hamas but do not question ongoing trade relations. That silence reveals a deeper contradiction: symbolic solidarity is permitted, but structural disengagement is avoided. The opposition’s call for economic accountability thus exposes the limits of performative outrage and pushes for a more coherent ethical stance.

Members of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) adopt a more moderate and legalistic tone. Speakers such as Utku Çakırözer and Gamze Taşcıer condemn civilian suffering on both sides, emphasizing international humanitarian law and advocating diplomatic peace efforts. Their speeches balance condemnation of Israeli violence with calls for restraint and emphasize multilateralism. Similarly, representatives from the Good Party (İYİ Parti) and Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA Partisi) foreground diplomacy and legal frameworks. The 1967 borders and the two-state solution feature prominently as normative foundations for conflict resolution, highlighting calls for temperance rather than emotive or nationalist rhetoric.

Yet, their discourse also sharply critiques Erdoğan’s foreign policy. Earlier, it was analyzed how Erdoğan consistently presents himself and Türkiye as a regional mediator and moral leader. His speeches often emphasize reconciliation, historical responsibility, and Türkiye’s role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but the opposition argues that it’s actually being sidelined not because of external bias, but because of the AKP’s own foreign policy choices. This kind of critique acts as a counterframe. They describe these policies as “adventurism” (*macera arayışı*) and “ideological obsessions” (*ideolojik saplantılar*), suggesting that Türkiye’s isolation is self-inflicted. They point to Türkiye’s exclusion from the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor, announced at the G20 summit, as a sign that the country is no

longer seen as a reliable or central actor in regional diplomacy (Soylu, 2023). So instead of reinforcing Erdoğan's image of Türkiye as a regional power, they reconstruct it as a country that has lost credibility and influence especially at a time when mediation is most needed.

5.2. 17 October, 2023 - Al Ahli hospital bombing

The bombing of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital on October 17, 2023, stands as one of the deadliest and most widely publicized incidents during the Gaza war. An airstrike hit a hospital in Gaza City, where many displaced Palestinians had taken shelter. Palestinian authorities reported nearly 500 deaths and over 300 injuries (Human Rights Watch, 2023). However, responsibility for the explosion remains highly contested. Palestinian sources and eyewitnesses attribute it to an Israeli airstrike, while Israeli officials claim it was caused by a misfired rocket from Palestinian armed groups such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad. Independent investigations, including analysis by Forensic Architecture and major international media outlets, highlight conflicting evidence and question Israeli official narratives. These contested claims deeply influence political and rhetorical responses globally. It offers valuable material to explore how President Erdoğan and other Turkish political figures framed and responded to the crisis during a highly sensitive moment. Erdoğan's and parliament's reaction to the hospital bombing is particularly revealing in understanding his discourse strategies and political stance in this escalated stage of the Gaza war.

On October 18 and 20, 2023, President Erdoğan issued a solemn statement on his 'X' (formerly Twitter) account regarding the devastating attack on Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza that occurred the previous day. Central to his message was the declaration of a three-day national mourning period ("3 günlük milli yas ilan edilmiştir"), a formal and symbolic act signaling Türkiye's collective grief and national solidarity with the Palestinian people. This was part of a broader pattern by Erdoğan. He has used national mourning in other moments to show political alignment and moral positioning. For example, in August 2024, Türkiye declared a one-day mourning period after the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, framing his death as

martyrdom and reaffirming support for Palestinian resistance (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024). Similarly, when Saudi King Abdullah died in 2015, Türkiye declared a day of mourning, reflecting diplomatic respect and acknowledging Saudi Arabia's religious and geopolitical weight (Daily Sabah, 2015) These examples show how mourning declarations in Türkiye often go beyond grief they're symbolic acts that communicate foreign policy priorities and regional alliances.

5.2.1. Victimhood and Universal Solidarity

Erdoğan's discourse employs emotionally charged lexical choices phrases such as "mostly children and innocent civilians", "respect to our martyrs", "tears", "tragedy", and the poetic "one cannot prosper through oppression" (zulümle âbâd olunmaz). Drawing on Fairclough (1995), these selections function as a moral-emotional strategy, designed to evoke empathy and a sense of urgency. The repeated focus on vulnerable populations, children, women, civilians and sacred institutions: "hospitals, schools, mosques, churches" expands the suffering beyond one group or religious community, invoking a universal humanitarian ethos.

President Erdoğan's 18 October statement frames the Palestinian tragedy as a shared experience of suffering, linking Turkish and Palestinian identities through a narrative of collective pain and sacrifice. His claim that "we share the suffering of the Palestinian people" positions Türkiye as a morally engaged actor, not just a distant observer. While he emphasizes solidarity with the broader Muslim world, he deliberately avoids exclusionary language. Instead, he extends his message to include Muslims, Jews, Christians, and "all peoples," reframing the conflict as a violation of universal human rights rather than a religious struggle. This inclusive approach strengthens Türkiye's moral stance, appeals to international audiences, and fosters internal unity by grounding the message in shared human values.

5.2.2. Delegitimization of Israel

Erdoğan's rhetoric also delegitimizes Israel's actions, describing the Israeli state not as a lawful actor but as "acting like a terrorist organization." This framing disqualifies

Israel's military conduct on legal and moral grounds and appeals implicitly to international law norms that forbid collective punishment and the targeting of civilians. It echoes critical discourse strategies identified by Wodak & Meyer (2015) wherein language is used to invert legitimacy, casting the "other" as deviant and unlawful (p. 116). By not recognizing Israel's legitimacy, Erdoğan reframes the conflict in terms of unlawful oppression, heightening moral condemnation and weakening Israel's international standing.

In the immediate aftermath of October 7th, he adopted a relatively restrained tone, urging both sides to de-escalate a position shaped by diplomatic ambiguity and the need to preserve regional ties. But as civilian casualties in Gaza mounted and international criticism of Israel intensified, Erdoğan's narrative became more confrontational. This pivot resonated with his domestic audience and reinforced Türkiye's image as a defender of oppressed Muslims.

This shift wasn't just a response to events. It was a calculated move to match the public mood and moral sentiment. Erdoğan's rhetoric evolves to reflect public sentiment, which strengthens his legitimacy both in Türkiye and on the global stage. Erdoğan's shift also reflects political instrumentalization: he avoids taking a rigid ideological stance, preferring silence on some issues and strong language on others to respond to the situation in a way that protects Türkiye's diplomatic relations while still appealing to his domestic audience.

5.2.3. The Politics of Resistance and Western Critique

Erdoğan's rhetoric increasingly targets Western actors, using phrases like "Western countries' encouragement" and "the legitimization race of Western media outlets" to shift blame beyond Israel and activate a broader anti-colonial discourse. This framing casts the West not just as complicit, but as structurally responsible for the suffering in Gaza emphasizing a civilizational narrative where Türkiye stands in moral opposition to Western hypocrisy. However, this isn't a new or isolated move. Erdoğan has long used anti-Western language to consolidate domestic support and assert Türkiye's

independence in foreign policy, especially when Western governments criticize his human rights record or sideline Türkiye in diplomatic efforts (Yılmaz & Morieson, 2024). It creates an implicit “us versus them” dynamic, contrasting Türkiye’s moral stance with what is portrayed as Western indifference or double standards. his discursive strategy contrasts Türkiye’s moral stance with what is portrayed as Western indifference or double standards, building on Wodak & Meyer (2015, p. 116) analysis of how legitimacy is inverted to position the speaker as righteous and the “other” as deviant. When Erdoğan says, “Our region needs to be saved as soon as possible,” it implicitly asserts Türkiye’s role as the key actor to lead this effort. He phrase doesn’t just express the urgency it positions Türkiye as both capable and responsible for initiating regional solutions. By using collective language like “our region,” Erdoğan embeds Türkiye within the broader Middle Eastern context while subtly elevating its status as a moral and strategic leader.

Erdoğan’s anti-Western framing works in tandem with his delegitimization of Israel. By linking Israeli aggression to Western complicity, he shifts the focus from a single actor to a broader system of injustice. It also resonates with domestic frustrations over stalled EU accession and long-standing perceptions of Western double standards. Declaring a formal period of national mourning for Gazan civilians is a masterful performative frame. By covering public institutions in black and ordering flags at half-mast, Erdoğan publicly aligns his administration with collective grief, indicating to Turks that the state not only shares in Palestinian suffering but bears ethical responsibility for it. This ritualized mourning functions as a moral-leadership frame; it dramatizes empathy, casts Türkiye as the regional conscience, and rallies domestic support around a shared sense of loss. At the same time, it projects an image of Turkish solidarity to Muslim publics across the Middle East, reinforcing Ankara’s claim to speak “on behalf of the ummah.” In doing so, the government turns grief into political capital: national mourning becomes both a sign of moral conscience and a strategic gesture that ties citizens to Erdoğan’s broader diplomatic line.

5.2.4. Parliamentary Discourse and the Al-Ahli Hospital Bombing

The 18 October⁵ 2023 TBMM debates on the Al Ahli Hospital bombing are marked by consistently strong, emotive, and morally charged language. Across party lines, especially from AKP and CHP speakers, the hospital bombing and broader Gaza conflict are framed as grievous violations of human rights and international law, often described as “crime against humanity”, “genocide”, and “massacre”. The suffering of innocent civilians, children, and patients in a hospital traditionally a protected space is emphasized to elicit moral outrage and empathy. The repeated focus on children and hospitals serves to stir emotions of sadness and sorrow and align the speaker with universal human values, reinforcing legitimizing social identities as defenders of the innocent (Fairclough, 1995). Lexical choices (e.g., “massacre,” “crime against humanity”) construct Israel as the absolute aggressor, delegitimizing its actions and assigning moral blame, consistent with discursive delegitimation (Wodak, 2015).

“A genocide unprecedented in human history is taking place in Gaza; the pain, cries, and tears are burning our hearts...” ...” (Ümmügülşen Öztürk, AKP)⁶

“Last night, more than 500 innocent people lost their lives as a result of Israel’s missile attack on a hospital in Gaza. I condemn Israel with hatred for this brutal and inhumane genocide.” (İsmail Güneş, AKP)⁷

In the parliamentary debate, opposition figures, especially Perihan Koca of the Yesil Sol Party, are introducing double standards that directly contradict the government’s moral principles. By demanding an immediate severance of all trade and diplomatic relations with Israel, Koca poses a rhetorical question (“Is \$8–10 billion worth more than the lives of Palestinian children?”) and unequivocally exposes the gap

⁵ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23936>

⁶ “Gazze’de insanlık tarihinde görülmemiş bir soykırım yaşıyor; acı, feryat ve gözyaşı yüreklerimizi yakıyor...” (Ümmügülşen Öztürk, AKP)

⁷ “Dün akşam İsrail’in Gazze’deki bir hastaneye füze saldırısı neticesinde 500’den fazla masum... hayatını kaybetmiştir. Bu vahşi ve insanlık dışı soykırımı yapan İsrail’i nefretle kınıyorum.” (İsmail Güneş, AKP)

between Erdoğan's public condemnation and Türkiye's continued trade relations. This move serves as both a moral assessment, revealing the dissonance between words and deeds, and a cause-and-effect diagnosis, implying that financial interests are more important than human suffering. Through strategic questions and the graphic comparison of costs and life cycles, the opposition shifts the debate from abstract solidarity to concrete responsibility, forcing the Erdoğan administration to defend its bilateral relations or risk losing credibility both at home and abroad.

CHP representatives also questioned government policy consistency, focusing on missed opportunities for peace and disproportionality in Türkiye's regional stance. In this intervention, they're spotlighting a broader pattern of exclusionary decision-making in Turkish foreign policy. The CHP draws a sharp contrast between the inclusive political practices of the past and the current government's closed-door decision-making. By recalling how former presidents regularly invited party leaders to Çankaya Köşkü for open discussions, the CHP highlights a tradition of consensus-building that has since dissolved. In its critique, the party argues that this shift has had two major consequences: it has undermined opportunities for peace and weakened democratic dialogue. By framing itself as the advocate for transparency and inclusive governance, the CHP positions its approach not just as a political alternative, but as a return to democratic norms that once encouraged cooperation across party lines. The speech constructs Erdoğan's authority through discursive strategies that highlight diplomatic isolation and democratic fragility. Parliamentary rhetoric becomes a tool not only for legitimizing his stance but also for managing dissent and consolidating support. This reflects what Wodak & Meyer (2015) describes as the strategic use of institutional discourse to reinforce political dominance while masking internal contradictions (p. 70).

Meral Daniş Beştaş (Green Left party) expands on this critique by accusing the ruling party of prosecuting one war while supporting another. She points out the contradiction in condemning Israel's bombardment of Gaza as a violation of international law, while simultaneously backing military operations in Rojava. As she

states, “You cannot condemn one war while being responsible for another or taking sides”. She strengthens this argument by highlighting concrete policy inconsistencies: Israelis have visa-free access to Türkiye, whereas Palestinians face travel restrictions. Another example, Turkish cement is reportedly used in the construction of Israel’s separation walls around Gaza. This inconsistency not only damages the government’s human rights image but also pressures lawmakers to align their diplomatic statements with actual trade and security practices. Moreover, it fosters a cross-sectoral solidarity that connects the Kurdish and Palestinian struggles under a shared ethical framework. Between October 5–11, 2023, Turkish warplanes bombed over 200 sites in North and East Syria. Among them were two COVID-19 hospitals in Kobane and Derik. These weren’t military installations. They were places where people sought care and doctors worked to save lives during the war (ANF English, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). These acts reflect the same horrors Türkiye denounces in Gaza, but carries out in Rojava. Beştaş’s critique gains strength here: it is not just a matter of diplomatic inconsistency, but also of the selective application of empathy, whose suffering is known and invisible.

This tension reveals how ethical frameworks are not neutral they are shaped by power, by politics, by proximity. Erdoğan’s government frames its support for Palestine as a moral stance, a defense of the oppressed. But when Kurdish lives are at stake, the language shifts: from solidarity to security, from protection to punishment. The same ethical words like human rights, international law, and justice are used, but their meaning is distorted depending on who is speaking and who is suffering.

The call for national and declaration of mourning (milliyas) becomes a unifying, performative response that presents Türkiye as a compassionate and morally upright nation. “Today, a three-day national mourning period will be declared by presidential decree. I am confident that all political parties in the General Assembly

will be pleased with this.” (Özlem Zengin, AKP).⁸ By “inviting” all parties to join in mourning, the AKP constrains opposition narratives, painting any refusal as insensitive. The language of mourning not only constructs national identity around a shared ethical stance (Fairclough, 1995) but also serves to discipline dissent by focusing attention on a consensual, emotive gesture, masking policy differences in the name of collective grief.

5.3. 28 October, 2023 – Great Palestine Rally



Visual 1. Predominance of Turkish flags over Palestinian flags at the Great Palestine Rally, Istanbul, October 28, 2023.⁹

The Great Palestine Rally, held on 28 October 2023 at Atatürk Airport in Istanbul, was one of the largest pro-Palestinian gatherings in Türkiye’s recent history. Organized by the ruling AK Party, the event drew hundreds of thousands of participants just one day

⁸ *Bugün gün içerisinde Cumhurbaşkanlığı kararnamesiyle üç günlük bir milli yas ilan edilecek. Ben Genel Kuruldaki bütün siyasi partilerin de bundan memnuniyet duyacağına eminim. (Özlem Zengin, AKP).*

⁹ *Note. From Turkish President Erdoğan calls out West, Israel for Gaza massacre, by Daily Sabah, 2023 (<https://www.dailysabah.com/world/mid-east/turkish-president-erdogan-calls-out-west-israel-for-gaza-massacre>). Copyright 2023 by DHA/Daily Sabah.*

before the centenary of the Republic of Türkiye. The timing and location were symbolically significant. While officially organized as a pro-Palestinian solidarity event, the rally's staging just one day before the Republic's centenary, invites deeper interpretation. Erdoğan made only a brief reference to the 100th anniversary of the Republic, a striking omission given the national significance of the date. The rally could be interpreted as an attempt to keep attention on Gaza. Its timing, however, also reflects Erdoğan's ambivalence toward the secular republican legacy and his broader project to redefine Turkish identity. Scholars cite the construction of a mosque in Taksim Square a traditionally secular-republican landmark as a key example of efforts to reshape the national narrative along conservative-Islamist lines (Özyürek, 2015; Tuğal, 2009).

The rally's visual environment further complicates the message. While the event was framed as pan-Islamic solidarity, Turkish flags (Visual 1) far outnumbered Palestinian ones, subtly recentering the spectacle around Turkish national pride. In the Turkish political imagination, the national flag carries intense emotional and symbolic weight, often merging patriotic and religious sentiments (Yavuz & Öztürk, 2019). In this context, the abundance of Turkish flags did not necessarily contradict the rally's message of Muslim unity; rather, it allowed Erdoğan to frame Türkiye itself as the moral leader of the Muslim world blending nationalism and Islamism in a shared symbolic register. This strategic visual framing reinforces Erdoğan's self-positioning as a protector of both Turkish sovereignty and global Muslim causes, while also allowing the AK Party to appropriate the Palestinian cause for domestic consolidation and political legitimacy.

Held at Atatürk Airport, once Türkiye's gateway to the world, the rally repurposed a space long associated with secular modernity and global connectivity into a stage for nationalist and religious solidarity. The airport itself has been at the center of political controversy since its closure in 2019, following the construction of the new Istanbul Airport. Critics have condemned the decision as wasteful and ideologically driven. Especially as parts of Atatürk Airport were later demolished to make way for a

government-backed “nation’s garden” and defense industry fairs (Turkish Minute, 2024). This rally marked the first major public event held there since its closure, transforming a contested urban space into a site of moral and political messaging. This detail reflected how the event served not only as a statement on foreign policy but also as a performance of national unity and identity.

5.3.1. Discursive Polarization: Hamas as Legitimate Actor, Israel as Illegitimate Aggressor

One of his central discursive strategies in this speech is the legitimization of Hamas and its redefinition as a resistance movement rather than a terrorist organization. This strategy aligns with Van Leeuwen’s (2007) legitimation framework, which identifies rhetorical techniques such as authorization, moral evaluation, and rationalization as key tools for justifying controversial actors or actions. Erdoğan fiercely criticizes domestic political actors who refer to Hamas as terrorists, stating: “Netanyahu is a terrorist, and so is Hamas, they say. Shame on them!” This reflects moral evaluation, where he frames such statements as acts of ignorance and betrayal. He further asserts, “There are misfortunates and malicious people in our country who are unaware of who Hamas is” invoking authorization by positioning himself as the knowledgeable moral authority. His repeated defense of Hamas serves to rationalize the group’s actions as legitimate resistance, aligning them ideologically and religiously with his political interests.

This shift in Erdoğan’s stance isn’t sudden or without context. He has always been cautious about openly taking sides in the Israel-Palestine conflict, mainly because he didn’t want to risk cutting ties with Israel. Türkiye and Israel have long maintained economic and military cooperation, including trade, tourism, and defense technology partnerships. Even during periods of diplomatic tension, Erdoğan preserved these ties to avoid jeopardizing Türkiye’s regional influence and economic interests (Erdemir, 2010; Eroğlu et al., 2016).

Closely linked to his defense of Hamas is Erdoğan's systematic delegitimization of Israel, which he portrays as both an occupying force and a criminal entity. He states plainly: "Israel, you are an occupier, you are an organization" ("İsrail, sen bir işgalcisin, sen bir örgütsün"), deliberately refusing to acknowledge Israel's full state legitimacy. He further declares: "We will declare you a 'war criminal' to the world"¹⁰ and "You are doomed to isolation"¹¹, framing Israel as a pariah on the global stage. Even when referencing civilian deaths in Israel, Erdoğan expresses skepticism, stating: "We don't even know how many civilians have died in Israeli territory; they don't publish it properly." These statements reflect a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at stripping Israel of moral and legal legitimacy, aligning with Reisigl & Wodak's (2005) concept of delegitimization through predication and argumentation, where actors are portrayed as untrustworthy, criminal, or morally bankrupt.

5.3.2. Anti-Western Rhetoric and Neo-Ottoman Aspirations

Another dominant frame in Erdoğan's discourse is the repeated accusation of Western hypocrisy and complicity. He uses emotionally charged language to condemn what he sees as selective humanitarianism, stating: "Those who cried crocodile tears over civilians in Ukraine now silently watch the deaths of thousands of innocent children". He openly blames the West for the violence in Gaza, declaring: "The biggest culprit of the massacre in Gaza is the West", and accuses Western powers of hiding their support for "child killers" behind liberal ideals like democracy and human rights.

This anti-Western rhetoric serves a triple purpose. First, it functions as international posturing, challenging Western dominance and positioning Türkiye as a moral alternative. Second, it aids domestic consolidation, rallying nationalist and Islamist bases around a common enemy. Third, it provides rhetorical immunity, allowing Erdoğan to deflect criticism by blaming external forces for both regional and

¹⁰ "Şimdi İsrail, biz de seni 'savaş suçlusunu' olarak dünyaya ilan edeceğiz"

¹¹ "İsrail, sen dünyada yalnızlığa mahkûmsun"

internal crises. These discourses heighten emotional mobilization, erase complexity, and frame the conflict in stark moral terms: Gazans as innocent victims, and Israelis as violent oppressors. This binary encourages identification with the “just” side and deepens Türkiye’s moral commitment to the Palestinian cause. Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model helps illuminate how such discourse constructs shared mental representations. Erdoğan’s repeated accusations of Western hypocrisy contribute to a collective worldview in which the West is morally corrupt and Türkiye is positioned as a defender of justice.

Erdoğan repeatedly frames Türkiye as a hegemonic, historically rooted regional power with a vast sphere of influence. The inclusion of many Muslim and Turkic regions suggests a neo-Ottoman ideological horizon: “From Crimea to Karabakh, from Bosnia to Kirkuk, from Palestine to Turkistan, from Afghanistan to Chechnya, we have shed tears for many geographies”. Gaza is rhetorically included as inseparable from Turkish homeland identity, bolstering expansionist and protector-of-the-ummah narratives. When he says: “What Adana was to us 100 years ago, Gaza is the same”, he is referring to the period after World War I when the Adana region was under French control. This occupation was part of the post-Ottoman territorial divisions agreed through the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Adana, historically part of the Turkish homeland, was seen as lost territory under foreign control during that time. By linking Gaza with Adana, Erdoğan symbolically frames Gaza as similarly integral to Turkish identity, another land under occupation but inseparable from the homeland. This reference fits his broader neo-Ottoman narrative, emphasizing Türkiye’s historical and ongoing responsibility as a regional power and protector of Muslim and Turkic regions formerly within the Ottoman sphere. This is reinforced by the historical reference that “In the list of Çanakkale martyrs, Gaza is there with 53 martyrs” implying a sacred continuity of struggle. The idea that “We are not just defending Gaza, we are defending our own future” suggests that solidarity with Palestine is portrayed as a national survival strategy, linking religious duty, historical destiny, and Turkish national identity. This reflects Fairclough’s notion of discourse as a means of constructing social identities and legitimizing power relations. Erdoğan’s rhetoric ideologically positions Türkiye as a regional protector and moral authority.

5.3.3. Symbolic Unity in a Divided Political Landscape

Erdoğan's rhetoric constructs a narrative of permanent siege, in which Türkiye is portrayed as a nation encircled by enemies both foreign and domestic. Through phrases like "those wielding the infidel's sword" (gavurun kılıcını çalanlar) and "those who sliced us up piece by piece" (dilim dilim doğrayanlar), he draws on war metaphors and historical grievances to evoke a sense of ongoing assault. The language is saturated with terms like "betrayal," "enemy," and "reckoning", which moralize political divisions and cast dissenters as complicit in national sabotage. Agency is assigned very distinctly: foreign powers are blamed for causing harm, certain domestic groups are seen as complicit, and the nation is portrayed as the victim. Though Erdoğan seldom names a specific conspiracy, he fosters a perception of persistent danger and culpability, hinting at an organized effort targeting the nation.

This framing resonates beyond foreign policy. It also shapes how domestic opposition is treated. Feminist and queer groups, Kurdish activists, and left-wing organizations held separate demonstrations, many of which were met with police repression. For instance, feminist groups continued to mobilize against gender-based violence and femicide, despite increasing bans on public demonstrations. The "We Will Stop Femicides" platform organized protests throughout 2023, including in Istanbul, where women defied government bans to mark International Women's Day in March 2023 and again in 2024 (Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2023). These protests were often met with heavy police presence and restrictions, especially in central areas like Taksim Square.

Queer and transgender activists have also faced increased repression, with pride events banned and participants detained for attempting to gather in defiance of the ban. Kurdish groups also condemn the government for replacing elected pro-Kurdish mayors with appointed trustees. (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Separately, leftist groups have continued to organize protests calling for peace, greater democracy, and economic justice, highlighting both the country's political tensions and growing social dissatisfaction. Their demands for justice, equality, and autonomy are often reframed as threats to national unity or moral order. In this context, Erdoğan's rally becomes

more than a show of solidarity with Palestine; it operates as a symbolic boundary-making exercise, where loyalty is defined through alignment with the state's narrative, and dissent is cast as betrayal. The moralized language of the speech reinforces this binary, turning political performance into a tool for consolidating power and silencing alternative visions of justice. Internal problems are thus not framed as issues of governance, but rather as the result of outside interference, which makes strong political control seem necessary and legitimate.

Erdoğan transforms support for Palestine into a proxy for Turkish nationalist strength and resilience. His declaration: “We are ready to sacrifice our lives for our nation... This nation can do it. It did yesterday, and it will today”¹² invokes a legacy of sacrifice and historical continuity. The use of collective pronouns and modal certainty (“we’re ready” “we will do”) signals unwavering resolve and moral obligation. By inviting the crowd to affirm their readiness, Erdoğan turns rhetorical support into a performative act of national unity, where emotional identification becomes political commitment. The speech does not merely state solidarity it enacts it, fusing domestic pride with transnational loyalty. Through this discursive move, the Palestinian cause is symbolically absorbed into the Turkish national narrative, becoming both a mirror and amplifier of Türkiye’s identity, endurance, and moral stature. The destinies of Türkiye and Palestine are rhetorically merged, not through policy, but through shared sacrifice and imagined continuity.

5.3.4. The “Great Rally for Palestine” in TBMM Discourse

The TBMM debates on 26 October¹³ 2023 took place just two days before the Great Palestine Rally in Istanbul. While the rally was marked by strong emotional language and bold political statements, the parliamentary discussions were more formal and restrained.

At the core of government discourse was an emotionally charged, humanitarian framing of the Gaza crisis. AKP representatives portrayed Gaza as a site of extreme suffering, using vivid language to foreground civilian pain: “The suffering of patients

¹² “*Milletimize feda-yı can etmeye hazırız... Bu millet yapar. Dün yaptı, bugün de yapar*”

¹³ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23940>

receiving treatment in Gaza's hospitals deeply shakes the conscience of humanity... surgeries are being performed without anesthesia, and thousands of pregnant women are at risk..." This framing positioned Türkiye's response not merely as political, but as a moral imperative rooted in the "national conscience". By calling on "all citizens" to support President Erdoğan's leadership, the ruling party cast participation in the Palestine rally as a collective act of national and humanitarian solidarity. The rally was thus discursively elevated from a public gathering to a symbolic performance of Türkiye's moral responsibility and global leadership.

Government speakers further embedded this humanitarian frame within a civilizational narrative. One speaker declared: "For four centuries, our ancestors ruled Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks in Bosnia; Christians and Jews in Jerusalem with justice and compassion. This was inscribed in history in golden letters as the Pax Ottomana, the Ottoman Peace." This invocation of the Ottoman legacy positioned Türkiye as the historic and rightful protector of the oppressed, casting its current stance as a continuation of a centuries-old tradition of justice and mercy. The international dimension of this discourse was further reinforced through anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric. Key AKP voices repeatedly referenced "imperialists zionists," constructing a stark binary: Türkiye as a principled actor confronting a complicit and hypocritical West.

However, this carefully constructed narrative was systematically deconstructed and resisted by opposition parties through a range of subtle and often confrontational discursive strategies. Drawing on framing theory, particularly Entman's (1993) concept of "causal interpretation," which refers to how political actors assign responsibility and meaning to events, opposition figures reframed the Gaza crisis not as a singular cause for national mobilization, but as part of a broader pattern of government instrumentalization of foreign suffering for domestic political gain. The timing of the rally 28 October, coinciding with the centennial of the Republic became a central point of critique. Erhan Usta from İYİ Parti, in a pointed rhetorical rejoinder, asked: "They're holding a Palestine rally on October 28. To pit the Palestine rally against the day of the

Republic's 100th anniversary, this cannot be right. For God's sake, couldn't you find another date?"¹⁴ This direct questioning, full of irony and anger, implies intentionality and shows that the ruling party has deliberately sought to overshadow the joy and symbolic unity associated with the 100th anniversary of the Republic by diverting national attention to a foreign conflict. By reframing the rally in this way, opposition actors aimed to expose the government's political motives and undermine its moral authority. They argued that the event was not a genuine expression of solidarity, but a strategic move to promote ideological narratives that conflict with the secular-republican values traditionally associated with the Republic's founding.

The pattern repeats across opposition responses. Hakan Şeref Olgun (İYİ Parti) lambasted the decision of state broadcaster TRT to postpone centennial programming in favor of Gaza coverage, asserting that "It is to cast a shadow on the celebrations" and accusing the government of manipulating state institutions to marginalize critical national celebrations. Mehmet Tahtasız (CHP) similarly framed the issue as an erosion of republican symbolism: "How many times can we celebrate our 100th anniversary? Will we ever experience this pride again?"¹⁵ These interventions explicitly foreground the stakes in controlling symbolic narratives and refuse to accept the equivalence of republican commemoration and partisan-mobilizing rally.

Discursive conflicts are intensified through the interactional dynamics of the parliamentary setting, where discursive power functions by regulating who speaks, how, and under what conditions. Through a critical discourse analytical lens, discursive power is understood as the capacity to shape meaning and legitimacy via language, embedded within institutional structures and political hierarchies. In this context the debates were punctuated by frequent interruptions, derision, and attempts to silence or delegitimize opposition speakers. Opposition MPs drew clear distinctions between

¹⁴ "28 Ekim gününde Filistin mitingi yapıyor... Cumhuriyetin 100'üncü yılının olduğu günle Filistin mitingini böyle karşı karşıya getirmek... yanlış bir şey olamaz. Başka bir tarih mi bulamadınız Allah aşkına?"

¹⁵ "Biz, kaç kere 100'üncü yılı kutlayabiliriz? Bizlere bu gururu bir daha yaşamak nasip olur mu?"

authentic public solidarity and state-orchestrated performances. For instance, when Ceylan Akça Cupolo (HEDEP) raised the issue of ongoing Turkish military cooperation with Israel “In these intelligence agreements between Türkiye and Israel. “Do you really think no one has been killed because of you? Israeli citizens enter this country without a visa, while even obtaining a visa for Palestinians depends on Israel’s permission. If you are sincere, then say it right now: ‘We are lifting visa requirements for all Palestinians.’ Say it. But to do that, you need to have a sense of shame.”¹⁶ Her remarks were met with dismissive interjections from AKP members: Ayhan Salman: “Do you have one?” Kadem Mete: “Do you have one?”. In these moments, discursive power is exercised not only by out-arguing but by attempting to disrupt and undermine the credibility of the speaker, shifting the debate from institutional critique to personal accusation, and in so doing, fragmenting the opposition’s narrative authority.

Opposition parties in the TBMM questioned why the government prioritized the rally over official Republic Day events. They saw it as a political move that ignored the importance of national unity and secular values. These debates showed how deeply divided Turkish politics is, especially when it comes to national identity and foreign policy. The way MPs interacted, interrupting, dismissing each other, and using sarcasm also revealed how hard it is to have open and respectful debate in a polarized environment. The Gaza crisis became more than a foreign issue; it was a stage for competing visions of Türkiye’s role in the world and its values at home.

5.4 11 Nov, 2023 - OIC & Arab League Joint Summit

On 11 November 2023, the OIC and the Arab League held a joint summit in Riyadh to respond to the war in Gaza. This was a rare moment where two major regional groups

¹⁶ “Türkiye ve İsrail’in yapmış olduğu bu istihbari anlaşmalarda...sizce hiç öldürülmemiş midir sizin yüzünüzden? ...İsrail vatandaşları bu ülkeye vizesiz geliyor, Filistinlinin vize alması bile İsrail’in iznine tabi tutuluyor. Eğer samimiyseniz bugün şimdi deyin, ‘Bütün Filistinlilere yönelik vize uygulamasını kaldırıyoruz deyin. Ama bunu yapmak için şimdi utanma diye bir duyguya sahip olmak gerekiyor.’”

came together, showing a shared concern over the rising number of civilian deaths and the lack of strong action from global powers. The summit aimed to show unity among Muslim and Arab countries and to call for a ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and international pressure on Israel.

Even though the summit did not lead to major decisions or actions, it was important for its symbolic value. It gave leaders a chance to speak out, shape public opinion, and present their countries as active players in the region. For President Erdoğan, it was also a chance to promote Türkiye's role as a defender of Palestinian rights and a leader in the Muslim world. His speech stood out for its strong language and emotional appeal, making the summit a key moment in Türkiye's response to the conflict.

5.4.1 Discursive Kinship and the Politics of Islamic Unity

President Erdoğan's speech represents a significant moment in Türkiye's diplomatic engagement with the Muslim and Arab worlds amid the ongoing Gaza conflict. Erdoğan's foregrounding of solidarity with Palestine "our Palestinian brothers" functions as a deliberate strategy of collective identity formation. The repetitive kinship language transforms a foreign conflict into a shared emotional and moral cause, constructing an "imagined community" rooted in affective and religious ties (Anderson, 1983). Such discursive strategies including kinship metaphors, collective pronouns, and moral evaluation are widely recognized in CDA as tools for mobilizing communal sentiment and forming alliances across national borders (Koller, 2012, p. 19). These expressions resonate with Koller's approach to collective identity in discourse, where the way individuals or groups are portrayed especially through emotionally charged language plays a central role in shaping who belongs to a community. By referring to Palestinians as kin, Erdoğan isn't just showing empathy; he's actively constructing a moral bond that positions Muslim audiences as part of a shared struggle. This rhetorical move stretches beyond national borders, inviting

listeners to see themselves as participants in a unified Islamic cause. Compared to earlier speeches such as the one at the Great Palestine Rally on 28 October 2023 this address shifted from nationalistic performance to transnational moral leadership. While the rally emphasized Türkiye's unique role and domestic unity, the summit speech positioned Türkiye within a broader Islamic coalition. Erdoğan repeatedly used collective pronouns like "we as the Islamic world," signaling a shift from national to civilizational framing.

5.4.2. Reframing the Gaza Conflict: Victimhood, Hypocrisy, and International Justice

Erdoğan contrasts the West's swift and unified response to the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack with what he describes as its "impotence, cowardice, and heartlessness" regarding the Gaza crisis. The Charlie Hebdo shooting a terrorist attack on the satirical magazine's Paris office that killed 12 people prompted massive global solidarity, including the "Je suis Charlie" movement and a unity march attended by over 40 world leaders (Petrikowski & Peter, 2025). Erdoğan's strategic invocation of this event serves to highlight what he frames as a double standard: the West's moral outrage when its own values are attacked, versus its silence or complicity when Palestinian lives are lost.

Erdoğan's framing of Western inaction "these countries neither call nor dare to call for a ceasefire" can be read through van Dijk's (1993) concept of ideological polarization, where discourse constructs an in-group defined by virtue and an out-group marked by vice. By positioning Türkiye and its allies as morally righteous and Western actors as hypocritical, Erdoğan's rhetoric reinforces domestic legitimacy while advancing a counter-hegemonic stance internationally. This maneuver also exemplifies what Fairclough (1995) describes as interdiscursive fusion: Erdoğan imports the moral lexicon of global justice and humanitarianism into a geopolitical critique, blending human rights discourse with anti-Western narratives. Such fusion not only contests

Western legitimation strategies but redefines Türkiye's diplomatic identity as the authentic voice of justice and empathy in global affairs.

Depictions of Israeli airstrikes as “barbarism unprecedented in history” and repeated references to “massacre” and “occupier” evoke profound moral outrage and channel collective trauma into a unifying narrative. This lexical choice reflects what Wodak (2001) defines as “strategic intensification” in critical discourse, where the saturation of dramatic terms forces emotional engagement and sharpens the boundary between victim and perpetrator. By insisting that “it is impossible to put the Hamas resistance fighters and the occupiers in the same category”, Erdoğan employs what Entman (1993) calls “framing of attribution” legitimizing Palestinian resistance and rejecting the terrorist label ascribed by Western and Israeli actors. This strategic position both elevates Türkiye's status among constituencies sympathetic to Palestinian resistance and draws a clear line between “just” struggle and illegitimate aggression.

Erdoğan's calls for a lasting ceasefire, continuous humanitarian aid, and referral of Israel to international legal mechanisms (e.g., UN Human Rights Council, ICC) demonstrate the pragmatic use of discourse to advance tangible, policy-oriented outcomes. Such “action-oriented” framing illustrates the linkage between CDA and policy studies, as outlined by Herman (2012), blending moral talk with claims to effect change.

Framing normalization and peace in the Middle East as impossible without solving the Palestinian question¹⁷ draws on collective memory and the logic of root-cause analysis. The explicit reference to the “1967 borders” and Jerusalem is “our red line,” invokes both legalist and symbolic registers, reinforcing the foundational status of the Palestinian question in Turkish and regional politics.

¹⁷ *“Filistin meselesi görmezden gelindikçe bölgede normalleşme çabaları akim kalmaya mahkûmdur”*

5.4.3. TBMM Debates in Response to the OIC Summit and Erdoğan's Address

Across three sessions held on 15¹⁸, 21¹⁹, and 23²⁰ November multiple parties articulated a range of perspectives that both echoed and diverged from President Erdoğan's own speech analyzed earlier. A central concern in CDA is the discursive construction of collective identity and ideological boundaries. Political actors use language not only to describe reality but to shape subject positions and moral hierarchies. Erkan Akçay's (MHP) assertion that "no other country shows a stance as principled, sincere, solid, and genuine as Türkiye" elevates a collective "we" into a uniquely virtuous actor, sacralizing national self-image. Conversely, Hasan Bitmez's (Felicity Party) repetitive labeling "they are all killers, they are all Zionists, they are all enemies of Türkiye and Islam" deepens a binary opposition between a righteous in-group and a demonized out-group. By using such sharp moral distinctions, both speakers frame the conflict in absolute terms of good and evil, strengthening solidarity among supporters and legitimizing rhetorical hostility toward perceived enemies.

Delegitimation of institutions and actors also features prominently. Akçay's blanket declaration that "there is no hope from the OIC" employs a negative existential claim to undermine an entire international body. MPs from Felicity Party, Birol Aydın and Bülent Kaya similarly cast symbolic diplomacy as inauthentic: Kaya's suggestion that summit expenses should have been redirected to Palestine rather than producing statements portrays ritualized meetings as wasteful performances. These moves echo Fairclough's notion of performative diplomacy rituals that mask inaction and reinforce a narrative in which institutional statements are meaningless unless accompanied by real support.

¹⁸ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23953>

¹⁹ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23956>

²⁰ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak/23958>

Alongside their criticism of the OIC, the deputies also target Erdoğan's foreign policy towards Israel. Referring to a past meeting between Erdoğan and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, they accuse the government of sending mixed messages, publicly condemning Israel's actions in Gaza while continuing diplomatic ties behind the scenes. These visits and images are described as short-sighted, cowardly, and lacking moral clarity. "Fear God, not Israel," one deputy exclaimed, accusing the government of prioritizing political alliances over ethical responsibility. Hasan Bitmez (Felicity party) also condemned diplomatic gestures toward Israel as acts of cowardice and complicity, "All of these visits, all of these meetings, are acts of poor judgment, my friends; they are all acts of short-sightedness, all of weakness, and of collaborationism. All of these photographs are the product of fear. Fear God, not Israel." This rhetorical intensity culminated in Bitmez's final speech on 12 December 2023, delivered just moments before his heart attack (Jazeera, 2023). Standing at the podium with a banner reading "Murderer Israel; collaborator AKP," he criticised the government's stance, saying: "Even if you escape the torment of history, you will not escape the wrath of Allah." One AKP MP even shouted "it's the wrath of Allah" when Bitmez collapsed. Bitmez's final words were delivered with urgency, and many now view them as both political criticism and a personal warning. For many, he is remembered as a politician who spoke out against the government until his very last moments.

Historicization and intertextuality serve as powerful rhetorical levers (Fairclough, 1995, p. 11). Mustafa Kaya's invocation of the 1973 oil embargo decision by OIC members recalls a moment of decisive collective action against the West, shaming current leaders for failing to replicate that solidarity today. Abdurrahim Dusak's re-quotation of the President's vehement condemnation at the 11 November summit functions as an attempt to rewrite Türkiye's leadership credentials into the official record. Drawing on past examples and reproducing authoritative statements, speakers present the current crisis as both a repetition of past failures and an opportunity to reclaim a proud heritage.

The construction of ongoing crisis narratives is another recurrent feature. Rhetorical questions such as “How many children could have been saved each day?” invoke moral pressure and guilt. Descriptions like “children continued to die, hospitals continued to be bombed” keep the sense of emergency alive, suggesting that every moment of diplomatic stall equals lives lost. These strategies sustain a heightened emotional atmosphere, portraying the conflict as a continuing moral catastrophe that demands immediate, substantial action.

These discursive tactics converge within five key narrative frames. The Moral Superiority frame casts Türkiye as uniquely principled, positioning other nations especially Western powers as morally deficient or hypocritical. The Western Hypocrisy frame highlights the contradiction between Western human rights rhetoric and their material support for Israel’s actions. The Symbolic versus Substantive Action frame dismisses diplomatic gestures, family photos, summit dispatch as empty performances that fail to change ground realities.

The Historical Solidarity frame invokes the 1973 oil embargo to demand renewed collective action, suggesting that past unity models the way forward. Finally, the Turkish Agency frame presents Türkiye as an active, solutions-oriented actor conducting diplomatic missions, in contrast to passive or complicit institutions elsewhere. While the frames are analytically constructed (etic), they are grounded in recurring rhetorical patterns and emic expressions found in parliamentary debates and presidential speeches. Rather than fixed categories, they serve as interpretive lenses to trace dominant narrative logics and strategic positioning.

These frames do not operate in isolation but reinforce the underlying CDA strategies. The Moral Superiority frame amplifies identity construction and in-group sacralization; Western Hypocrisy joints with delegitimation language; Symbolic versus Substantive Action rests on critiques of performative diplomacy; Historical Solidarity leans on intertextual references to past successes; and the Turkish Agency frame aligns with formal legitimation tactics that spotlight Türkiye’s leadership role.

5.5. 24 September, 2024 - UN General Assembly

On 24 September 2024, President Erdoğan addressed the 79th UN General Assembly in New York, delivering one of the most forceful condemnations of Israel's military campaign in Gaza to date. Speaking amid a humanitarian catastrophe that had claimed over 41,000 Palestinian lives, Erdoğan accused Israel of committing genocide and likened Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler. Invoking Hitler evokes the Holocaust, genocide, and totalitarianism. Erdoğan's use of this analogy positions Israel's actions in Gaza as morally equivalent to the Nazi regime's crimes. A claim that carries immense emotional and political weight, especially in Europe and the Middle East. While President Erdoğan's comparison of Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler was one of the most forceful condemnations of Israel's Gaza campaign, it also provoked a pointed response from Netanyahu. In a statement issued on 27 December 2023, Netanyahu rejected Erdoğan's moral framing, stating: "Erdoğan, who commits genocide against the Kurds, who holds a world record for imprisoning journalists who oppose his rule, is the last person who can preach morality to us" (Jazeera, 2023) This counter-accusation highlights the mutual delegitimization between the two leaders. Erdoğan's invocation of genocide and Nazi analogies was met with Netanyahu's own invocation of Türkiye's domestic human rights record, particularly its long-standing conflict with Kurdish populations and suppression of dissent.

Erdoğan's speech at the UN General Assembly on 15 September 2024 marks a strategic articulation of Türkiye's position on the Palestinian question. Erdoğan emphasises Türkiye's role as a central actor directly affected by and actively engaged in managing the crisis. By describing Türkiye as a country "not distant from tensions but at their very heart," he portrays the nation as indispensable in both regional and global politics, asserting its moral and diplomatic authority (Fairclough, 1995). Additionally, his discourse evokes strong moral outrage by detailing the extensive destruction in Gaza, emphasizing that sacred sites such as mosques and churches, as

well as hospitals, schools, and ambulances, have been targeted. Notably, he repeatedly mentions mosques first, tapping into religious sensitivities and reinforcing the Islamic solidarity theme. Furthermore, the speech evokes religious-nationalist sentiment by highlighting the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque and Haram al-Sharif, emphasizing that their protection constitutes a “red line” for Türkiye and the wider Muslim world (Anderson, 1983).

Throughout the speech, speaking before a global audience, including diplomats, heads of state, and international media Erdoğan delivers a sharp critique of the UN and the broader international system, highlighting its inability to effectively intervene in the ongoing Gaza conflict. He characterizes the UN as “inefficient” and “cumbersome,” noting that its foundational mission has largely been unfulfilled. This criticism carries more weight given the rising number of civilian deaths in Gaza and the widespread sense that the UN has failed to take meaningful action, especially as Erdoğan accuses Israel of committing genocide. This critique aligns with Türkiye’s longstanding position advocating for reform, particularly concerning the disproportionate power of the five permanent Security Council members, a point underlined by his reference to the slogan, “the world is bigger than five.” Erdoğan’s framing of international institutional failure amplifies the urgency of the Palestinian crisis and calls into question the legitimacy of existing global governance structures (Erakat, 2019).

A recurring theme in the speech is the hypocrisy of certain states and international actors. Erdoğan accuses some governments of publicly supporting ceasefire efforts while secretly providing arms and ammunition to Israel, thus highlighting a disconnect between rhetoric and action. This exposes what Erdoğan portrays as Western duplicity and serves to delegitimize Western policies, positioning Türkiye as a principled actor standing for genuine humanitarian concerns (Fairclough, 1995).

Erdoğan continues his pattern of delegitimizing Israel through charged terminology such as “ethnic cleansing,” “genocide,” and “step-by-step occupation.”

This strong lexical choice which was also seen in earlier speeches, portrays the Israeli government as committing systematic and criminal acts against Palestinians, which not only fuels international condemnation but also serves to rally Turkish and Muslim solidarity. However, in contrast to earlier addresses that leaned more heavily on confrontational and populist tones, this speech introduces a notable shift: he distances his discourse from antisemitism, explicitly rejecting hostility toward Israel's citizens and Judaism. This distinction is significant for maintaining diplomatic credibility and reframing criticism of Israeli government policy as a universal human rights issue rather than religious or ethnic animus (Said, 1978). At the same time, Erdoğan explicitly legitimizes Palestinian resistance, describing it as "just," "honorable," and "heroic." This positive framing runs consistently throughout his speeches, rejecting Western and Israeli attempts to define groups like Hamas as terrorist organizations and instead positioning resistance as a legitimate struggle for liberation (Entman, 1993). In this context, Erdoğan's speech stands out for its strategic realignment, maintaining strong criticism of Israeli policy while adopting a more globally resonant human rights discourse.

Erdoğan underlines that the principal cause of the conflict is Israeli occupation and insists on the urgent establishment of an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This aligns with international law frameworks and UN resolutions and helps Türkiye position its foreign policy within a broadly accepted legal-political paradigm. In terms of solutions, Erdoğan calls for decisive international measures. He demands enforcement of UN Security Council Resolution 2735 (UNSC, 2024). Furthermore, Erdoğan draws a provocative analogy between Netanyahu and Hitler, invoking historical memory as a moral evaluation strategy to frame Israel's actions not simply as excessive, but as genocidal. This form of moral legitimation amplifies the urgency of global intervention and constructs a binary of moral versus immoral actors, placing Türkiye firmly on the side of justice and human rights. By juxtaposing this with Türkiye's own actions sending aid, suspending trade with Israel, Erdoğan further legitimizes his government's position

through instrumental rationality, framing Türkiye's stance as not only morally right but practically committed (Fairclough, 2003).

In previous sections, I aligned TBMM debates with Erdoğan's major speeches to trace how parliamentary discourse complements or amplifies presidential framing. However, following Erdoğan's address to the 79th UN General Assembly on 24 September 2024, one of his most forceful condemnations of Israel's actions in Gaza, the TBMM was in recess (16 August – 1 October 2024). As a result, no immediate parliamentary response was recorded. This temporal gap is significant: it highlights how Erdoğan's speech operated as a standalone diplomatic intervention, unmediated by domestic legislative debate. It also underscores the performative nature of international platforms like the UNGA, where Erdoğan's rhetoric is directed more toward global audiences than parliamentary negotiation.

6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to interrogate how the Palestinian question has been discursively constructed by Turkish political elites in the wake of the October 7th, 2023 Gaza War, a period marked by seismic geopolitical ruptures and acute domestic polarization. Leveraging the analytical strengths of Fairclough's CDA (1995), framing theory (Entman, 1993), and the concept of political instrumentalization, the research moved beyond straightforward policy assessment to unravel how language itself becomes a site of power, identity negotiation, and legitimation in contemporary Türkiye.

Theoretically, this thesis demonstrates that political discourse about Gaza in Türkiye is irreducibly plural, dynamic, and deeply contested, a finding that nuances conventional portrayals of unitary state narratives. Fairclough's model was instrumental in highlighting how discourse becomes social practice, reproducing and transforming ideologies tied to religion, nationalism, and regional hegemony, while framing theory elucidated the mechanisms by which narratives are foregrounded, backgrounded, or strategically silenced in the struggle for public consensus and legitimacy.

This study took a multi-actor perspective, examining not only President Erdoğan's evolving rhetoric across varied public forums, but also the contested discourses within the Turkish parliament. By applying critical discourse and framing analysis, this research explored how political language strategically constructs and contests meanings of the Palestinian cause, serving shifting domestic and international political goals over time

Initially, Erdoğan adopted a restrained, conciliatory tone that balanced calls for calm with implicit appeals to shared humanitarian values and international law, a discursive strategy designed to maintain regional stability and economic interests, given Türkiye's recent normalization efforts with Israel. As international outrage over Israel's actions in Gaza mounted and domestic public opinion galvanized, Erdoğan recalibrated his rhetoric, foregrounding images of Turkish moral leadership, Islamic

solidarity, and historical memories of resistance against occupation. This shift was not merely reactive, but a calculated use of language to consolidate support among national and religious constituencies, position Türkiye as a ‘guardian of the oppressed,’ and project regional authority.

Government discourse continuously leveraged emotionally charged symbols, historical analogies, and religious frames, mapping the Gaza conflict onto the national narrative of Turkish identity and collective memory. Such performative framing enabled Erdoğan to claim a moral high ground internationally while reinforcing his domestic position as a steadfast leader in times of crisis.

By contrast, opposition actors in the TBMM both echoed and challenged Erdoğan’s framing, employing alternative rhetorical strategies to serve distinct political and ideological aims. While pro-Palestinian sentiment cut across party lines, opposition parties nuanced their critiques by exposing the gap between performative solidarity and ongoing economic or diplomatic ties with Israel. Through deliberate framing choices, they cast Erdoğan’s discourse as opportunistic, leveraging the Palestinian cause to question the government’s credibility and underline issues of political hypocrisy and domestic governance. Left-leaning and secular parties sometimes drew connections between support for Palestine and broader critiques of Turkish domestic repression or economic problems, whereas Islamist opposition groups amplified calls for Muslim solidarity, occasionally demanding more radical action than Erdoğan was willing to take.

This discursive diversity reflects a pluralistic battleground within Turkish politics, where frames are not static or uniform but are tactically adapted to contest national identity, moral legitimacy, and authority. The shifting and contested nature of both government and opposition frames serves not just to express positions on the Gaza conflict, but to advance broader projects: Erdoğan’s narrative fortifies his vision of a resurgent, morally engaged Turkish state, while opposition frames harness the same issue to challenge regime legitimacy, mobilize dissent, and delineate alternative leadership models.

More broadly, this thesis reveals how the Palestinian question functions as a

prism through which the complex intersections of ideology, power, and identity in contemporary Türkiye are refracted. The evolving discourse indicates a Türkiye engaged in an ongoing project of reimagining its role regionally and its self-conception nationally, blending Islamic solidarity with neo-Ottoman ambitions. At the same time, tensions between symbolic commitments and political realism underscore the dialectics of power that shape both foreign policy and domestic legitimacy. Such findings resonate with wider global patterns where identity politics and crisis rhetoric intertwine as leaders renegotiate political order in times of upheaval. The study thus contributes to understandings of how political discourse is both performative and constitutive, actively crafting the boundaries of community, authority, and resistance.

Looking forward, the research suggests these battles over meaning, morality, and solidarity are likely to intensify as regional crises amplify struggles over national identity and political authority at home. In tracing these multi-layered discursive battles, the thesis not only advances our understanding of the strategic and performative dimensions of elite rhetoric in Türkiye, but also demonstrates the broader power of language to construct, contest, and sometimes even transform political realities in moments of crisis.

What emerges is a more nuanced picture of Turkish political discourse than many studies suggest. Erdoğan's dominance as chief narrator is real but not uncontested; his framing of the Palestinian cause relies on a blend of performative solidarity, historical mythology, and tactical ambiguity. Opposition actors, far from being passive recipients or mere dissenters, adopt counter-discursive positions that expose contradictions, complicate public narratives, and remind audiences that the meaning of "solidarity" or "resistance" is never settled.

Academically and methodologically, this thesis advances critical discourse analysis in political communication by demonstrating how executive and parliamentary actors dynamically and strategically mobilize frames for legitimation and contestation, not only expressing political stances, but actively shaping the boundaries of possible identification and action. Empirically, it contributes to

scholarship on populism, symbolic politics, and foreign policy instrumentalization, showing how moments of international crisis are appropriated and transformed within national discursive fields.

There are several limitations to this research. First, its scope is confined to elite discourse, speeches and parliamentary debates, meaning that public reception, grassroots mobilization, and media framing were outside the bounds of analysis. This focus risks missing how competing narratives circulate, are reinterpreted, or are resisted among wider audiences, which limits the broader sociopolitical context and potential for more nuanced interpretations. Second, the dataset is bounded both temporally and thematically: focusing on official discourse between October 2023 and September 2024, the study cannot account for the evolution of rhetoric or identity construction in subsequent developments, nor can it capture the full diversity of political actors and communicative practices.

Additionally, the inherent subjectivity of interpretation within Critical Discourse Analysis means analyst perspective, theoretical lens, and selective attention shape the findings, which may introduce bias or overlook alternative meanings. Practical constraints, such as the availability of comprehensive data, complexity of categorizing multiple actors' stances, and the intensiveness of detailed CDA, also shaped the breadth of the study.

While this thesis critically examines elite discourse on the Palestinian question in the post-October 7, 2023 context within Türkiye's executive and parliamentary arenas, several avenues remain open to deepen and extend understanding. Comparative research integrating media analysis, public opinion, and social media dynamics would broaden insights into how elite frames are received, contested, or reshaped beyond formal political settings, illuminating the socio-political circulation of solidarity narratives and their impact on public mobilization (Aras, 2002; Uğur et al., 2024).

Longitudinal studies are equally important to trace the evolution of Turkish political discourse on Palestine over time, particularly as regional geopolitical developments and domestic political realignments unfold. Tracking rhetorical shifts

beyond September 2024 would reveal how enduring or contingent current framing strategies are, and how they interact with ongoing political crises or diplomatic negotiations.

Methodologically, collaborative and mixed-methods approaches that incorporate quantitative content analysis, ethnographic insight, and multisensory discourse, including visual and digital communication could help overcome interpretive subjectivities inherent in qualitative discourse work, offering a fuller, more nuanced picture of political communication in Turkey's volatile context.

Further comparative studies examining Erdoğan's rhetoric alongside contemporaneous discourses of other regional leaders could enrich understanding of how cultural-political contexts mediate symbolic politics related to Palestine. Broader "multi-arena" investigations encompassing both foreign policy and domestic political discourse would capture the complex and iterative negotiation of identity, legitimacy, and political authority that this study highlights.

This study began by highlighting the palpable tension in Turkish political discourse: Erdoğan's impassioned public solidarity with Palestine contrasted sharply with concrete government actions, such as the arrest of pro-Palestinian activists and the maintenance of economic ties with Israel. Far from empty rhetoric, this contradiction itself forms a key discursive site where political legitimacy is continuously negotiated and contested. The government's symbolic framing of Palestine serves to mobilize nationalist and religious sentiments, yet the selective suspension of certain actions reveals pragmatic constraints and geopolitical calculations underlying official solidarity. This paradox encapsulates the complex realities of Türkiye's domestic politics and international relations, where performative language, state power, and strategic interests intersect in ways that expose the contingent and often contradictory nature of "solidarity" in times of crisis.

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Appendix 1

Coded dataset of Erdoğan's public statements

Date	Event/Context	Type of key event	Example speech
7/8 Oct 2023	Initial Reaction to Oct. 7 attacks	Initial political reaction	https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/149726/-cumhuriyet-i-gercek-demokrasiyle-kucaklastiracak-sivil-bir-anayasayi-ulkemize-kazandiracagiz- https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/149748/-orta-dogu-ya-kalici-barisin-gelebilmesi-ancak-filistin-israil-sorununun-nihai-cozume-kavusturulmasiyla-mumkundur-
17 Oct 2023	Al Ahli hospital bombing	Humanitarian tragedy; national mourning declared	https://x.com/RTErdogan/status/1714733104273801538 https://x.com/RTErdogan/status/1715389941667004695
28 Oct 2023	Great Palestine Rally	Mass mobilization event	https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/149910/-gazze-sadece-orada-hayata-tutunma-mucadelesi-verenlerin-degil-hepimizin-meselesidir-
11 Nov 2023	OIC & Arab League Joint Summit	Diplomatic summit; Pan-Islamic leadership	https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/150162/-batili-ulkelerin-filistin-de-suregelen-katliamlar-karsisinda-sessizlige-burunmeleri-utanc-vericidir-
24 Sep 2024	UN General Assembly Speech	Global diplomatic platform	https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/153717/birlesmis-milletler-genel-kurulu-nda-yaptiklari-konusma