

SAUDI ARABIA AND TÜRKIYE 'S POLICY TOWARDS HAMAS: BETWEEN PRAGMATISM AND REGIONAL GEO-POLITICAL BALANCE

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ABSTRACT. This article analyzes the foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye toward Hamas during the 2020–2025 period, marked by regional realignments, the Abraham Accords, and renewed escalation in Gaza. As a central non-state actor in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Hamas has generated divergent responses among key Muslim-majority states. This study examines how ideological orientation, regime security concerns, and regional geopolitical calculations shape Saudi and Turkish policy choices. Employing a qualitative descriptive analytical approach and a desk study method, the research draws on official government statements, diplomatic documents, reports from international policy institutions, and peer-reviewed academic literature. The findings show that Saudi Arabia maintains political distance from Hamas due to its association with the Muslim Brotherhood, concerns over domestic and regional stability, and a preference for state-centric diplomacy through the Palestinian Authority as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. In contrast, Türkiye sustains political engagement with Hamas, reflecting ideological affinity with political Islam and an activist foreign policy aimed at advancing regional influence. Comparatively, this study argues that Saudi Arabia's Hamas policy is primarily driven by regime-security pragmatism, whereas Türkiye's approach reflects the ideological instrumentalization of the Palestinian issue, producing distinct foreign policy trajectories despite shared rhetorical support for Palestine. These findings highlight fragmentation among Muslim-majority states and demonstrate how the Palestinian issue has become an arena of regional ideological competition rather than policy convergence.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia; Türkiye; Hamas; geopolitics; comparative foreign policy.

INTRODUCTION

The public understands that the Palestinian conflict is a central issue in the international politics of the Islamic world, involving various state actors with different geopolitical and ideological interests. Two major countries have a tremendous and significant influence on the Palestinian issue, namely Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Both often voice support for the Palestinian cause, but have different foreign policy approaches in responding to internal Palestinian dynamics, especially in addressing the two main forces of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas (Al-Omari, 2019: 4-5).

Saudi Arabia's preference for the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) reflects a state-centric foreign policy role conception grounded in regime security and institutional legitimacy rather than ideological proximity. From an FPA and constructivist perspective, *moderation* is operationalized through three interrelated practices: recognition posture (acceptance of the two-state framework and prior agreements), institutional embeddedness within multilateral diplomacy, and functional cooperation on security and humanitarian governance. As Al-Omari (2019) observes, Riyadh perceives the PA as an actor that "*operates within internationally accepted diplomatic frameworks,*" enabling Saudi Arabia to perform the role of a stabilizing regional mediator. Daga (2023) similarly argues that Saudi policy privileges actors embedded in "*state-centric*

diplomatic mechanisms," a preference consistent with what Barari (2017) terms the Kingdom's effort to "*preserve regional stability and regime security*" through institutionalized diplomacy rather than engagement with armed non-state actors.

By contrast, Türkiye's approach toward Hamas is shaped by a normative construction of legitimacy rooted in identity politics and symbolic foreign policy practices. This study distinguishes symbolic indicators discursive recognition, leadership rhetoric, and political engagement from instrumental indicators, defined as material or security commitments. Symbolically, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan asserted that "*Hamas is not a terrorist organization, but a liberation group*" (Reuters, 2023), directly contesting the designation regimes of the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, and Israel, while the United Nations as an institution does not list Hamas. Instrumentally, however, Türkiye's policy remains constrained; as Erdurmaz and Bağcı (2024) note, Ankara combines ideational alignment with Hamas with continued diplomatic and economic cooperation with Israel, illustrating a dual track foreign policy in which identity-based claims coexist with pragmatic state interests.

This difference reflects perceptions of Palestinian factions' political legitimacy and each state's power strategy and ideology. Saudi Arabia, as a conservative monarchy, is concerned about the influence of political Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which is at the root of Hamas' ideology, as it threatens the country's internal stability.

Meanwhile, Türkiye under Recep Tayyip Erdogan has adopted a populist Islamist narrative that makes supporting Hamas part of its regional diplomacy.

Saudi Arabia has taken a cautious stance towards Hamas, particularly its military activities. In 2019, Riyadh arrested and extradited several Hamas members as part of its efforts to distance itself from the group and align itself with the US-backed Abraham Treaty that aims to normalize relations with Israel. The move reflects Saudi Arabia's desire to build alliances to contain Iranian regional influence. So Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023 was seen as disrupting Saudi Arabia's normalization plans with Israel (Keynoush, 2016). Saudi Arabia has increasingly distanced itself from Hamas, which it sees as linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization Saudi Arabia opposes due to ideological and political rivalries.

Saudi Arabia's stance on Hamas is also influenced by its broader regional strategy, including its thawing ties with Iran and its cautious approach to normalization with Israel. After Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, and Israel launched a military operation against Hamas that left thousands of Palestinians dead, Saudi Arabia strongly condemned Israel and accused it of genocide in Gaza, reflecting a shift away from normalization talks with Israel (Italian Institute for International Political Studies: ISPI, accessed June 16, 2025).

Saudi Arabia's cautious stance toward Hamas is rooted in its prioritization of regional stability and security. Riyadh views militant activities and Iran-linked networks as potential destabilizing forces in the Middle East. As one regional analysis notes, Saudi foreign policy tends "to emphasize regional stability and maintain strategic relations with the West," positioning itself against actors perceived to exacerbate conflict, including non-state militant groups associated with Iranian influence (Afrilia et.al, 2026). In this context, Saudi Arabia is wary of Hamas's militarized role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which it perceives as a factor that can undermine broader Gulf security architectures.

Second, strategic alignment with the United States shapes Saudi policy. Through the framework established by the Abraham Accords (2020) normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states, Riyadh has signaled its preference for diplomatic engagement over armed struggle. Although Saudi Arabia has yet to normalize with Israel, its public messaging underscores alignment with U.S. diplomatic objectives; notably, the Saudi Foreign Ministry reiterated in February 2025 that it "will not establish ties with Israel without the creation

of a Palestinian state," highlighting its conditional cooperation with Western partners while distancing itself from armed non-state actors like Hamas (Reuters, 2025). This stance reinforces Riyadh's effort to be seen as a responsible geopolitical actor within a U.S.-led order.

Third, countering Iranian influence is central to Saudi foreign policy. Iran's backing of groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah is widely understood in Riyadh as part of Tehran's strategy to extend its regional influence, which Saudi policymakers view as a direct threat to Gulf stability. This rivalry has historically shaped Saudi responses to various proxy conflicts (Reuters, 2025). Finally, Saudi Arabia consistently emphasizes diplomatic solutions to the Palestinian issue. Public statements from Saudi officials repeatedly advocate for a negotiated peace process rather than military confrontation, reflecting the Kingdom's broader preference for state-centered diplomacy and negotiated settlement over support for armed resistance a position that further explains its deliberate distancing from Hamas in foreign policy formulation.

Meanwhile, Türkiye's support for Hamas has significantly affected its regional relations, particularly with Israel and its Western allies. Türkiye views Hamas as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and provides political and financial support, which is part of a broader strategy to challenge the Middle East status quo. This stance has strained Türkiye's relations with Israel, leading to a period of severe diplomatic tension. However, pragmatic trade, energy, and security cooperation has continued; there has been a significant ideological rift (Erdurmaz, et.al, 2024).

In addition, support for Hamas complicates Türkiye's relations with Western countries, causing concern as Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by many Western countries. These dynamics reflect Türkiye's complex role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and contribute to a pattern of strategic cooperation and strained relations at the regional and global levels (Erdurmaz, at.el, 2024).

Based on this explanation, the author argues that Türkiye's support for Hamas in the broader Middle East context aligns with its regional ambitions and ideological alignments, which influence its competition with other regional powers and shape its diplomatic posture. This support is part of Türkiye's efforts to assert its influence in the region, which often puts it at odds with countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which have different approaches to the Palestinian issue and regional security.

Existing studies have examined Saudi Arabia's and Türkiye's policies toward the Palestinian issue from different perspectives, but largely in separate analytical tracks. Research on Saudi Arabia emphasizes regime security, institutional diplomacy, and opposition to political Islam, highlighting Riyadh's preference for the Palestinian Authority as a state-like and internationally recognized interlocutor (Barari, 2017; Al-Omari, 2019; Daga, et.al, 2023). In contrast, studies on Türkiye focus on ideological affinity with political Islam and activist foreign policy narratives, showing how Islamist identity and populist discourse shape Ankara's engagement with Hamas while coexisting with pragmatic relations with Israel (Çelenk, 2016; Yilmaz, 2021; Erdurmaz, et.al, 2024). Despite these contributions, the literature lacks a systematic comparative analysis that integrates both cases within a single framework and accounts for the post-2020 regional context, including the Abraham Accords and the 2023 Gaza war. This study addresses this gap by offering a comparative, theory-informed analysis that distinguishes symbolic and instrumental constructions of legitimacy in Saudi and Turkish policies toward Hamas.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study within the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) framework to examine Saudi Arabia's and Türkiye's policies toward Hamas during the 2020–2025 period. The units of analysis consist of official foreign policy texts, including government communiqués, leaders' speeches, and diplomatic documents selected based on defined time frame, explicit relevance to Hamas or Palestinian policy, and identifiable institutional authorship. Primary data derive from official statements and institutional publications issued by governmental and multilateral organizations, particularly the United Nations and official state sources.

Secondary sources include policy analyses, institutional and advocacy reports (e.g., ISPI, UN Watch), humanitarian information platforms such as ReliefWeb, and reputable international media including Reuters, Al-Jazeera, and Arab News. These data were selected because they directly reflect formal policy positions, enable systematic comparison between cases, and provide reliable evidence for analyzing policy framing and legitimacy construction. Data validity is ensured through predefined selection criteria, source triangulation, institutional authorship verification, cross-referencing between primary and secondary materials, and consistency checks within

qualitative content analysis to strengthen analytical reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The contrasting policies of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye toward Hamas are best explained by separating policy drivers (why) from policy instruments (what). Saudi Arabia's stance is driven by regime security concerns, ideological opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, alliance management with the United States, and threat perceptions linked to Iran. Riyadh views Hamas as a destabilizing non-state actor and therefore prioritizes institutional legitimacy and regional stability (Barari, 2017; Al-Omari, 2019; Daga, et.al, 2023). In contrast, Türkiye's policy is shaped by ideological affinity with political Islam, populist leadership narratives, and aspirations for symbolic leadership in the Muslim world, leading Ankara to frame Hamas as a legitimate resistance movement (Çelenk, 2016; Yilmaz, 2021).

These divergent drivers are operationalized through distinct instruments. Saudi Arabia employs state-centric diplomacy, supporting the Palestinian Authority, avoiding official engagement with Hamas, and channeling assistance through multilateral and humanitarian mechanisms while maintaining normalization ambiguity with Israel (Reuters, 2025). Türkiye, by contrast, relies on symbolic and selective instrumental measures, including public rejection of Hamas' terrorist designation, political engagement with Hamas leaders, extensive humanitarian aid to Gaza, and continued pragmatic economic relations with Israel (Erdurmaz, at.el, 2024).

Saudi Arabia Between Pragmatism And Caution

Saudi Arabia has historically supported the Palestinian cause, but remains wary of Hamas because of its Islamist roots and links to the Muslim Brotherhood - a group Riyadh considers a threat to regional stability and its monarchy. After initially offering some support in the early 2000s, Saudi policy towards Hamas became more distant, especially after the group took control of Gaza in 2007.

Security Concerns and Ideological Distrust:

Saudi Arabia views Hamas' Islamist ideology and its closeness to Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood as a concern. Barari considers that Saudi Arabia's fear of Hamas in the frame of Ideological and Geopolitical Threats is quite reasonable because Saudi Arabia positions itself as one of the leaders of the Islamic world and a guarantor of stability in the Middle East region. In this context, relations with

Islamist groups such as Hamas are very sensitive. Although the Saudis support the struggle of the Palestinian people, the kingdom shows a cautious attitude and even tends to keep its distance from Hamas. Several reasons explain Saudi Arabia's fear of Hamas (Barari, 2017: 45-48).

As mentioned above, the Saudis regret Hamas' association with the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas is an ideological offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a transnational Islamic movement that Saudi Arabia considers a direct threat to the legitimacy of its monarchical system. Since the 2011 Arab Spring, when the Muslim Brotherhood gained victories in several Arab countries (such as Egypt), the Saudis have aggressively fought the group's influence. As part of the Muslim Brotherhood network, Hamas is seen as carrying destabilizing potential that could stimulate domestic opposition to the kingdom (Valeri, 2021).

In addition, Hamas's closeness to Iran is also a significant burden for Saudi Arabia. Although Hamas is a Sunni group, its strategic relationship with Shia Iran is a source of great concern for Riyadh. Saudi Arabia sees Iran as a significant regional competitor in the struggle for influence in the Islamic world. Iran's support for Hamas (especially in the form of funds and weapons) reinforces the perception that Hamas is Iran's geopolitical tool at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The existence of Hamas can also bring the potential for domestic radicalization. Saudi Arabia fears that open support for Hamas could strengthen radical Islamist groups at home. Hamas' rhetoric of resistance and jihad has the potential to arouse sympathy from domestic extremist groups opposed to the monarchical system. Saudi Arabia feels responsible for maintaining regional stability and good relations with the West. As a major ally of the United States and an essential partner of Western countries, Saudi Arabia seeks to maintain its image as a moderate power that rejects "terrorism." Hamas, which the US and EU classify as a terrorist organization, is considered to risk damaging Saudi diplomatic positions if it gets too close (Barari, 2017: 45-48).

Meanwhile, in the context of Middle Eastern geopolitical interests, the Saudis want to control the Palestinian narrative. Saudi Arabia wants to be the primary mediator on the Palestinian issue (Ryan, 2019). However, Hamas, which is dominant in Gaza and often acts outside the official diplomatic structure (namely the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah), is considered to interfere with the Saudi agenda to direct the peace process according to its regional

interests, including the potential normalization of relations with Israel.

Alignment with the Palestinian Authority and Diplomatic Isolation of Hamas

Riyadh has generally avoided direct engagement with Hamas leaders. Instead, Riyadh promotes Palestinian unity through the Palestinian Authority (PA), led by Fatah, and sees it as a more legitimate and controllable partner. The Saudis recognize the PA as the official representation of the Palestinian people, particularly under Fatah's leadership. Riyadh channels consistent financial and political support to the PA. In regional mediation, the Saudis place the PA as a key partner in peace negotiations with Israel (Daga, et.al, 2023).

The isolation of Hamas is due to its perceived ideological affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, a group banned in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis avoid official relations with the Hamas leadership, in contrast to Türkiye or Iran's approach. Saudi diplomacy supports Palestinian unification efforts under the PA, not armed forces like Hamas. Saudi strategic motivation for this policy is to maintain internal stability by rejecting Islamist groups that could potentially trigger domestic radicalism. Prevent Iranian influence through the Hamas network. Maintain a position as a neutral and pro-peace diplomatic actor in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Mastrogiacomo, 2023).

Abraham Accords

Saudi Arabia has taken a more pliable stance with the change in regional alignments, especially after normalization efforts such as the Abraham Accords. Despite the Abraham Accords, while continuing to reject formal relations with Hamas, Riyadh occasionally hosts Hamas-related delegations, signaling a pragmatic willingness to maintain indirect lines of communication.

The Abraham Accords are a series of diplomatic agreements initiated in 2020, facilitated by the United States, that normalize relations between Israel and several Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. The main goal is to build economic, technological, security, and diplomatic cooperation between Israel and Arab countries, ending Israel's diplomatic isolation in the Middle East region (Faheema, 2023)

Saudi Arabia has not officially signed the Abraham Accords, but has shown an open and cautious attitude towards the normalization process with Israel. Riyadh states that diplomatic normalization is only possible after a just solution for the Palestinians based

on the 2002 Arab peace initiative, which includes the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied territories (Ulrichsen, 2020).

Behind the scenes, however, there are indications that the Saudis are exploring a limited normalization deal with Israel, including through the mediation role of the United States and trilateral talks covering strategic issues such as the Saudi civilian nuclear program, defense alliances, and technology transfers.

Saudi Arabia has historically been one of the prominent supporters of the Palestinian cause and a major donor to the Palestinian Authority (PA). However, Riyadh's policy has shifted strategically, especially since the ascension of Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) as Crown Prince. Today, the Saudis focus on pragmatic regional and global relations, including with the US and Israel, to protect national interests and economic transformation (Vision 2030). It is also noticeable that the Saudis use a conservative diplomatic approach, avoiding direct conflict with Israel while still condemning human rights violations in the Palestinian territories. At the time of the 2023 Gaza conflict, Saudi Arabia condemned Israeli aggression and urged an end to violence, but did not provide direct support to Hamas, which is considered close to the Muslim Brotherhood, a group considered a threat by the Kingdom (Saeed, et.al, 2025).

Saudi Arabia stands at the crossroads between its tradition of support for the Palestinians and the reality of regional politics that demands reconciliation with Israel for strategic and economic interests. Although not yet an official part of the Abraham Accords, Riyadh is playing an essential role in reorganizing Middle Eastern geopolitics, while trying to maintain its moral and political commitment to the Palestinian people.

Türkiye, Between Ideological Closure And Regional Competition

Türkiye, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling AKP party, has taken a very pro-Hamas position. This is thought to be rooted in ideological affinity with Hamas and intense regional competition with other powers, particularly Israel and some Gulf states. Main Characteristics of Türkiye 's Policy with Hamas.

Ideological Alignment

The Islamist Türkiye government identifies with Hamas ideologically and politically. Türkiye also considers it a legitimate resistance movement

against the Israeli occupation and not a terrorist organization.

The closeness between Türkiye President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Hamas is not only political and strategic, but also rooted in strong ideological similarities, particularly in the context of political Islam. Hamas, as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) in Palestine, espouses the ideology of Islamism - the belief that Islam should be the primary basis of governance and socio-political life. This view aligns with the ideological foundations of the Erdoğan-led Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Türkiye (Çelenk, 2016).

Erdoğan has consistently shown open support for Hamas as the "legitimate struggle movement of the Palestinian people," and rejected the terrorist label pinned on Hamas by Western countries. This support is part of Türkiye 's post-2002 foreign policy narrative that seeks to strengthen regional influence through Islamic symbolism, the role of defender of Muslims, and opposition to Western and Israeli domination.

This closeness is also evident in several key events, such as Erdoğan's anti-Israel views, particularly in the aftermath of Israel's attacks on Gaza (e.g., in 2008, 2014, and 2021), where Erdoğan called Israel a "terrorist state" and defended Hamas as a legitimate party in the resistance. There is also a strong informal diplomatic relationship, where several Hamas figures, including Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshaal, have visited Türkiye and been welcomed by high-ranking government officials. Türkiye also openly opposes Arab-Israeli normalization because it weakens the Palestinian cause and strengthens the occupation.

However, despite ideological closeness, Türkiye maintains pragmatic bilateral relations with Israel, especially in the economic and energy sectors. This shows that Erdoğan's support for Hamas is not absolute, but rather part of a flexible foreign policy strategy that is laden with Islamist identity symbolism. Thus, Erdoğan's closeness to Hamas cannot be separated from the ideological orientation of political Islam that characterizes the AKP government, as well as Türkiye 's ambition to become a moral and political force for Muslims in the Middle East region (Yilmaz, 2021).

Diplomatic and Financial Support

Türkiye has hosted Hamas leaders several times and provided humanitarian and political support to Gaza. Ankara has been a vocal critic of Israeli policies and has consistently defended Hamas' right to resist.

Türkiye, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been one of the most vocal supporters of Hamas at the international level, especially after his Islamist-leaning party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), came to power in 2002. This support is diplomatic, financial, and symbolic, and is part of Türkiye's foreign strategy of positioning itself as a defender of Palestinian rights on the world stage (Dalay, 2023).

Türkiye actively supported the political legitimacy of Hamas, especially after Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006. Some forms of Türkiye diplomatic support include: The reception of high-ranking Hamas officials in Ankara, where important Hamas figures such as Khaled Meshaal and Ismail Haniyeh have repeatedly visited Türkiye and met directly with President Erdoğan and other high-ranking officials. Various official statements defended Hamas, and Türkiye also strongly rejected the classification of Hamas as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union. Erdoğan called Hamas a legitimate "resistance movement" against Israeli occupation.

In international forums, Türkiye actively voiced criticism of Israel, such as at the UN and OIC, and pushed for an investigation into Israel's aggression against Gaza, especially when Hamas was the target of attacks. Rejection of Israeli-Arab normalization without resolving the Palestinian issue was also voiced. Türkiye criticized the Abraham Accords for weakening the Palestinian position and excluding Hamas from the diplomatic process.

Although not entirely transparent, various sources indicate that Türkiye also provides financial and humanitarian assistance to Gaza, including to institutions allegedly affiliated with Hamas. The assistance is in the form of funding development projects in Gaza through the Türkiye Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Türkiye finances the construction of hospitals, schools, infrastructure, and humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip. There is also the transfer of social assistance and logistics, where charitable organizations such as IHH (Insani Yardım Vakfı) distribute humanitarian aid to Gaza and are often associated with support for Hamas, especially after the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. In strengthening the military movement, Türkiye is also involved in funding Hamas' political operations, as Western intelligence reports indicate that Hamas uses Türkiye territory for fundraising, training, or organizing. However, the Türkiye government has officially denied this.

Türkiye's support for Hamas strengthens its position as a challenger to the pro-Western and

pro-Israeli alliance in the Middle East, as well as a counterpoint to the approach of Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE that favor the Palestinian Authority (PLO/Fatah). This support also strengthens Erdoğan's image as a leader of the Islamic world who cares about Palestine and is a domestic tool to enhance political support at home (Tür, 2023: 7-8).

Türkiye's Relations with Israel and Regional Interests

Despite its support for Hamas, Türkiye is also making normalization efforts with Israel, especially in terms of economic and energy cooperation. This creates a balancing act: maintaining ideological support for Hamas without alienating potential economic partners (Muminov, 2024). Despite Türkiye's vocal support for Palestine and Hamas, relations with Israel are maintained based on considerations of strategic, economic, and geopolitical interests. Türkiye-Israeli relations are within the "diplomatic realism" dynamics, where national interests dominate over mere ideological solidarity.

Türkiye and Israel have a growing trade relationship, although political relations are often strained. The volume of bilateral trade between Türkiye and Israel is sizable, exceeding USD 7 billion per year, and continues to grow even after political incidents such as Israel's incursion into Gaza. The primary commodities Türkiye exports to Israel include industrial products, vehicles, textiles, and food, while Israel exports high-tech and chemical goods to Türkiye. The two countries also establish logistics connectivity, shipping, and regular flights (Şafak, 2024: 10-16).

Türkiye's interest in natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has been essential to its relations with Israel. Türkiye has shown interest in gas pipeline projects from Israel to Europe, although it is hampered by competition with Greece and Cyprus. Likewise, potential energy cooperation with Israel is an alternative route for Türkiye to secure energy supplies and strengthen its regional influence.

Despite geopolitical rivalries, especially post-Arab Spring, Türkiye recognizes the importance of maintaining cooperative relations in several areas. Türkiye and Israel have previously cooperated in the military and intelligence fields, especially in the 1990s. Although this cooperation has declined, communication remains open. In the context of regional stability, Türkiye understands that maintaining communication with Israel is essential for managing tensions in Syria, Lebanon, and Gaza.

Erdoğan often uses anti-Israel rhetoric to build a domestic image as a defender of Muslims, but balances it with diplomatic pragmatism. After the rift caused by the Mavi Marmara incident (2010), the two countries nevertheless restored diplomatic relations (2016 and again in 2022). Erdoğan has not closed the lines of communication with Israel, even holding direct conversations with the Israeli President to discuss regional and bilateral issues (Erdurmaz, et.al, 2024).

Türkiye 's relationship with Israel reflects the duality between ideology and national interests. On the one hand, Türkiye positions itself as a defender of Palestine and Hamas to strengthen its domestic political position and influence in the Islamic world. On the other hand, Ankara maintains strategic and economic cooperation with Israel, as part of a realistic and opportunistic foreign policy in dealing with the dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean region and the Middle East at large.

Saudi Arabia And Türkiye In The 2023 Gaza Conflict

The Gaza conflict in 2023 is back in the international spotlight after the outbreak of a major war between Hamas and Israel in October 2023. In this maelstrom of conflict, two regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, played roles that reflected their different approaches, strategic interests, and geopolitical positions.

Responding to this crisis, Saudi Arabia chose a cautious approach and focused on normalization. Saudi Arabia decided to take a careful diplomatic position, despite rhetorically expressing support for the Palestinian cause. However, Riyadh's position does not lead to a direct defense of Hamas due to several factors. The Saudis are focused on normalizing relations with Israel. Before the conflict erupted, it explored a diplomatic normalization agreement with Israel through the mediation of the United States, as part of a significant regional project. About Hamas, Riyadh continues to view it as a non-state actor affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, a group considered to jeopardize regional stability and contradict the direction of Saudi Arabia's domestic policy (Valeri, 2021).

Finally, about adherence to regional coalitions, Saudi Arabia remains in line with the moderate Arab bloc (Egypt, Jordan, UAE) that prefers diplomacy and strengthening the Palestinian Authority (PA) over supporting armed resistance groups such as Hamas. Nonetheless, after the escalation of violence by Israel in October 2023, the Saudis increased diplomatic pressure in international forums, such as the OIC and

the UN, to condemn the aggression against Gaza and call for a ceasefire.

In contrast to Saudi Arabia, Türkiye adopted a harsh rhetoric and a proactive approach towards Hamas. Türkiye, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took a more active and vocal approach in supporting Hamas, despite not officially cutting ties with Israel. Türkiye 's position in the 2023 Gaza conflict reflects several models of approach that it considers to be in line with its geopolitical vision, namely: First, building a strong anti-Israel rhetoric. Erdogan called Israel a "terrorist state" and strongly condemned military action against civilians in Gaza. Second, strengthening support for Hamas. Türkiye continues to provide moral, diplomatic, and indirect financial support to Hamas, which is considered part of the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people. Third, the mission of dominance in Middle Eastern geopolitics. Through rhetoric and humanitarian actions, Türkiye tries to establish itself as the leader of the Muslim world and a counterweight to other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Fourth, intensifying humanitarian aid activities. Türkiye is actively sending humanitarian aid and building hospitals and civil infrastructure in Gaza through NGOs such as IHH (which was once involved in the Mavi Marmara mission).

Thus, the position of both in this regional political constellation is that Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are not on the same policy line. The Saudis are more focused on regional stability and reconciliation with the global powers of the United States and Israel. At the same time, Türkiye takes a bolder populist and ideological approach while balancing its national interests.

AID During The Palestine And Israel Conflict

The governments of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye has provided aid to the Palestinian people for decades as part of their support in the face of Israeli occupation. Both countries have consistently expressed political solidarity and provided humanitarian assistance and diplomatic support to the Palestinians in their efforts to achieve independence and end the Israeli occupation. This assistance includes various forms, including financial support, development assistance, and humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people affected by the conflict. This support is also in line with the role of Muslim countries in fighting for Palestinian rights at the international level.

Saudi Arabian Kingdom Aid

In the past two decades, Saudi Arabia has donated more than \$6.5 billion to Palestine, including

humanitarian aid, funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and support for health and emergency projects in Palestinian areas such as the West Bank and Gaza (Saudinesia, 2023, accessed 22 June 2025). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also active in organizing international conferences and Arab-Islamic summits to support Palestinian rights and oppose Israeli actions, and reject all crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people.

Since the conflict escalated in October 2023, Saudi Arabia has contributed \$185 million in humanitarian aid through its aid agency KSrelief, focusing on food, shelter, health, and logistical support (Arabnews, 2024, accessed 22 June 2025). The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) recently provided \$40 million to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in Gaza, supplying food for more than 250,000 people and tents for 20,000 families. Saudi Arabia continues to fund UNRWA activities in Gaza, including food, shelter, water, and sanitation projects (Reliefweb, 2024, accessed 22 June 2025).

Diplomatically and politically, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strongly supports the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. It links normalization with Israel to this outcome. The Kingdom actively participates in international diplomatic efforts, including co-chairing the UN 2025 conference with France to achieve recognition of a Palestinian state and increasing support for the Palestinian government and UNRWA (Unwatch, 2025, accessed 22 June 2025). Saudi Arabia has shown increased diplomatic support towards the Authority. The Kingdom has vocally condemned Israeli actions, which it sees as an obstacle to peace and a Palestinian state, emphasizing its commitment to a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

Based on the data above, the author argues that the policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in providing support to Palestine is more of a diplomatic and humanitarian approach. Still, it does not support Hamas, which approaches the resistance against Israel. Saudi Arabia's diplomatic approach to the Palestinian issue is reflected in its efforts to fight for the rights of the Palestinian people through diplomatic channels in international forums. Saudi Arabia often uses its political and economic influence to garner global support in pressuring Israel to respect Palestinian rights. In addition, the Kingdom usually encourages conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation as the leading solution rather than violent confrontation. In addition to the diplomatic approach,

the humanitarian aspect is also the primary focus of Saudi Arabia's support for Palestine. Humanitarian assistance in the form of funds, logistics, and medical facilities is often channeled to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people, especially victims of conflict and prolonged blockade. This assistance reflects Saudi Arabia's solidarity as a Muslim-majority country and as part of its humanitarian responsibilities and regional stability.

However, Saudi Arabia's attitude towards Hamas is quite firm and different. Hamas, as a group that promotes armed resistance against Israel, does not receive direct support from Saudi Arabia. This is because Saudi Arabia views the military and violent approach as worsening the situation and hampering the peace process that is being pursued diplomatically. In addition, Hamas is also seen as a group affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood Organization, which has been the target of restrictions by the Government of Saudi Arabia. In the complex geopolitical context of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia seeks to position itself as a mediator and stabilizing force that promotes peaceful and humanitarian solutions. Therefore, Saudi Arabia's support strategy for Palestine tends to be pragmatic and long-term oriented, prioritizing diplomacy and humanitarian assistance, and rejecting support for military or violent actions carried out by groups such as Hamas. This approach reflects Saudi Arabia's commitment to seeking peaceful solutions and maintaining regional stability without compromising broader humanitarian and international political interests.

Türkiye Government Aid

In 2022, the Türkiye Government provided financial assistance to the Palestinian people totaling approximately \$16.6 million, according to data from the UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service (Fts.unocha.org, 2022, accessed June 25, 2025). In addition, the Türkiye Red Crescent has delivered humanitarian aid worth more than \$16.2 million to Gaza since October 7, 2023, including several air and sea shipments of food parcels, medical supplies, shelter kits, and other essential items benefiting more than 1 million people (Relieweb, 2024, accessed June 25, 2025). Türkiye have also provided 42,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Gaza since October 2023, including weekly deliveries of drinking water and medical care for more than 400 Palestinian patients in Türkiye (Trtworld, 2024, accessed June 25, 2025).

In addition, Türkiye have supported the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) with \$10 million annually between 2023 and 2025, with an

additional transfer in 2024 to support Palestinian refugees (Reuters, 2024, accessed 25 June 2025). The main components of Türkiye 's financial and humanitarian support to the Palestinian people in 2024 include; First, direct and in-kind financial assistance, Türkiye provides substantial bilateral aid to Palestine, including cash and in-kind, covering various sectors such as development, health, education, institution building, security, tourism, and agriculture. Second, humanitarian aid through the Türkiye Red Crescent has been a major actor in delivering medical supplies, food, and other humanitarian goods directly to Palestinians, particularly in Gaza (Kausch, 2017).

The author considers that the Türkiye Government, in addition to providing support to Hamas in carrying out armed resistance with Israel, but the Türkiye Government also provides diplomatic support and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people affected by the conflict. The Türkiye Government has shown a consistent attitude in supporting the Palestinian struggle in the face of prolonged conflict with Israel. The assessment includes various dimensions of support provided by Türkiye, not limited to the aspect of armed resistance through support to Hamas, but also contains active diplomacy and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people affected by the conflict.

First of all, in the context of armed resistance, the Türkiye Government is known to provide support to Hamas, one of the leading groups involved in opposition to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. This support shows that Türkiye not only condemns acts of violence committed by Israel, but also actively supports resistance mechanisms that are considered legitimate by some. However, this support is often debated in the international arena, given the status of Hamas, which is considered by some countries to be a terrorist group. Türkiye also plays a vital role in diplomacy, in addition to the military aspect or armed resistance. The Türkiye Government often uses its strategic position as a country at the crossroads between the Middle East and the Western world to fight for a peaceful settlement and recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people in international forums. Through diplomatic channels, Türkiye seeks to promote a two-state solution and urges a halt to Israeli military aggression that has destroyed infrastructure and caused civilian casualties in the Palestinian territories.

The humanitarian support provided by Türkiye to the Palestinian people is also an essential aspect of Türkiye foreign policy on this issue. The government and various humanitarian organizations in Türkiye actively distribute medical aid, food, and other

necessities to Palestinians suffering from the conflict. This assistance is necessary given the humanitarian emergencies that often occur in the region, especially after military attacks that damage hospitals, schools, and other public facilities. This approach shows that Türkiye is trying to play the role of a mediator and supporter who is responsive to the needs of the Palestinian people, while emphasizing Türkiye 's political position in the regional and international arena. Türkiye 's holistic support further strengthens solidarity with Palestine while emphasizing Türkiye 's presence as an essential actor in the conflict and peace efforts in the Middle East.

Divergent Foreign Policy Approaches Of Saudi Arabia And Türkiye

This subsection examines the fundamentally divergent foreign policy approaches of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye toward the Palestinian issue, with particular emphasis on their respective positions on Hamas. Although both states consistently articulate political and humanitarian support for Palestine, their policies diverge in orientation, instruments, and strategic objectives. These differences are not merely tactical responses to evolving conflict dynamics but reflect deeper ideological commitments, domestic security considerations, and regional geopolitical ambitions (Al-Omari, 2019).

Saudi Arabia's policy toward Palestine is characterized by diplomatic pragmatism and a strong preference for regional stability. Riyadh situates the Palestinian issue within a state-centric framework that prioritizes regime security, international legitimacy, and alignment with established diplomatic norms. Consequently, Saudi Arabia recognizes and supports the Palestinian Authority (PA) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people while maintaining a cautious and distancing posture toward Hamas (Daga, et.al, 2023). This stance is rooted in Saudi opposition to political Islam, particularly movements affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and in concerns over Hamas' military activities and its strategic ties with Iran, which are perceived as potential sources of regional destabilization and domestic radicalization (Barari, 2017). As a result, Saudi support for Palestine is predominantly channeled through multilateral diplomacy and humanitarian assistance rather than endorsement of armed resistance.

By contrast, Türkiye's approach is more ideologically driven and confrontational. Under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Palestinian issue has been framed as both a moral

obligation and a symbol of resistance against Israeli occupation and Western dominance. Türkiye regards Hamas as a legitimate political and resistance actor, a position shaped by ideological affinity with political Islam and Ankara's ambition to project leadership within the Muslim world (Çelenk, 2016; Yilmaz, 2021). This support is reflected in Türkiye's diplomatic defense of Hamas in international forums and its sustained political engagement with Hamas leaders, alongside extensive humanitarian assistance to Gaza (Dalay, 2023).

Nevertheless, Türkiye's ideological alignment with Hamas coexists with selective pragmatism. Despite harsh political rhetoric, Ankara continues to maintain economic and strategic relations with Israel, particularly in trade and energy, illustrating a hybrid foreign policy that blends normative commitments with realist calculations (Erdurmaz et.al, 2024; Şafak, 2024).

The table that follows synthesizes these findings by systematically comparing Saudi and Turkish policies across key dimensions, including ideological foundations, definitions of Palestinian political legitimacy, attitudes toward armed resistance, relations with Israel and the United States, and long-term strategic objectives. Collectively, the evidence demonstrates that the Palestinian issue has become an arena of regional competition rather than cohesion. Saudi Arabia and Türkiye represent two competing models of Muslim-state engagement with Palestine: a pragmatic, diplomacy-centered approach aimed at stability, and an ideologically infused, populist approach oriented toward moral leadership and regional influence. For the purpose of clarifying and highlighting the key findings of this study, the author summarizes them in Table 01, which presents a comparative analysis of the policies of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye toward Palestine and Hamas.

Table 1. Significant Findings

Analytical Dimension	Saudi Arabia	Türkiye	Key Analytical Findings / Implications
Ideological Foundation of Policy	Conservative monarchical governance; strong rejection of political Islam (anti-Muslim Brotherhood)	Electoral-populist Islamism under AKP; ideological affinity with Muslim Brotherhood networks	Ideological divergence constitutes the primary structural determinant of contrasting Hamas policies
Definition of Palestinian Political Legitimacy	Institutional legitimacy centered on the Palestinian Authority (PA/Fatah)	Resistance-based legitimacy emphasizing Hamas' electoral mandate (2006)	Competing conceptions of legitimacy contribute to external fragmentation of the Palestinian cause
Status of Hamas as a Political Actor	Treated as a high-risk non-state actor with destabilizing potential	Recognized as a legitimate resistance movement	Hamas functions as a key fault line in regional Middle Eastern politics
Approach to Armed Resistance	Explicit rejection of armed struggle; prioritization of diplomacy and negotiations	Normative justification of armed resistance under conditions of occupation	Divergent normative interpretations of violence in anti-colonial conflicts
Perception of Hamas-Iran Relations	Viewed as a direct geopolitical and security threat	Assessed pragmatically and not framed as a primary strategic danger	Perceived Iranian threat strongly shapes Saudi policy but less so Türkiye's
Domestic Security Considerations	Hamas perceived as a potential catalyst for domestic radicalization	Hamas not viewed as a domestic security threat	Internal regime security is a decisive variable in Saudi foreign policy behavior
Relationship with the United States	Long-term strategic alliance; policy alignment constraints	Transactional and fluctuating relationship	U.S. interests act as a structural constraint on Saudi but not Turkish policy
Policy toward Israel	Pragmatic and cautious engagement; rhetorical condemnation without confrontation	Confrontational rhetoric combined with sustained economic relations	Both states practice realism, differing mainly in diplomatic style and discourse
Position on the Abraham Accords	Not a signatory but strategically open to normalization	Strong rejection and public criticism	Saudi Arabia adopts "constructive ambiguity," while Türkiye pursues open opposition
Response to the 2023 Gaza War	Diplomatic activism focused on ceasefire and humanitarian relief	Harsh rhetoric, moral legitimization of Hamas, and activist diplomacy	Gaza 2023 clarified competing leadership models in the Muslim world
Forms of Support to Palestine	Predominantly diplomatic and humanitarian (UNRWA, KSrelief)	Humanitarian assistance combined with political support for Hamas	Divergent soft-power strategies and narrative framing
Scale of Post-October 2023 Assistance	Approximately USD 185 million via humanitarian channels	Over 42,000 tons of aid plus USD 16-20 million annually	Both are materially significant donors, but with contrasting political orientations
Role in Global Diplomacy	Mediator and stabilizing actor	Normative advocate and ideological challenger	Two distinct models of Muslim-state engagement in the Palestinian issue
Impact on Palestinian Unity	Strengthens the PA while marginalizing Gaza	Reinforces Hamas, potentially deepening intra-Palestinian divisions	External patronage paradoxically weakens internal Palestinian reconciliation

Analytical Dimension	Saudi Arabia	Türkiye	Key Analytical Findings / Implications
Long-Term Strategic Objectives	Regional stability, international legitimacy, Vision 2030 priorities	Symbolic leadership of the Muslim world and regional influence	Palestine operates as an arena of regional hegemonic competition
Broader Regional Consequences	Consolidation of the moderate Arab bloc	Challenge to the Middle Eastern status quo	The Palestinian issue functions as a proxy arena for ideological rivalry

Source: Compiled from multiple sources and the author's analysis.

This study finds that the divergent foreign policies of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye toward Hamas and the Palestinian issue are fundamentally shaped by contrasting ideological orientations, security perceptions, and regional power ambitions. Saudi Arabia's approach is rooted in monarchical conservatism and a strong rejection of political Islam, particularly movements affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, Riyadh privileges institutional legitimacy through the Palestinian Authority and adopts a diplomatic humanitarian strategy that emphasizes negotiation, international mediation, and regional stability while deliberately distancing itself from Hamas. This position is further reinforced by Saudi Arabia's strategic alignment with the United States, its concerns over Iranian regional influence, and its prioritization of domestic security and regime stability.

In contrast, Türkiye's policy reflects an Islamist populist orientation under the AKP government, which frames Hamas as a legitimate resistance movement against Israeli occupation. Türkiye combines strong rhetorical and diplomatic support for Hamas with extensive humanitarian assistance to Gaza, positioning itself as a moral advocate for Palestinian resistance and a challenger to the prevailing regional order. Despite this ideological stance, Türkiye simultaneously maintains pragmatic economic and diplomatic relations with Israel, illustrating a dual-track strategy that balances ideological commitment with national interests.

The findings demonstrate that while both countries provide substantial humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, their competing political narratives and patronage patterns contribute to the external fragmentation of the Palestinian cause. Rather than fostering unity, Saudi and Turkish policies reinforce factional divisions, underscoring how the Palestinian issue has become an arena of regional ideological competition rather than a cohesive platform for collective diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Saudi Arabia and Türkiye adopted divergent foreign policy approaches toward Hamas between 2020 and 2025, reflecting contrasting configurations of regime security

concerns, ideological orientations, and regional role conceptions. While both states consistently articulate rhetorical and humanitarian support for the Palestinian cause, they differ fundamentally in how political legitimacy and armed resistance are defined and operationalized. Saudi Arabia's policy is anchored in regime security, opposition to Muslim Brotherhood linked movements, and a state-centric understanding of legitimacy, leading Riyadh to prioritize the Palestinian Authority, emphasize multilateral diplomacy and humanitarian assistance, and maintain deliberate distance from Hamas. By contrast, Türkiye's approach is shaped by identity-driven and populist foreign policy narratives that frame Hamas as a legitimate resistance actor, even as Ankara simultaneously sustains pragmatic economic and diplomatic relations with Israel. Comparatively, these findings suggest that competing regional strategies have contributed to the fragmentation of Palestinian political representation rather than its consolidation, positioning the Palestinian issue as an arena of ideological contestation and geopolitical rivalry rather than collective alignment among Muslim-majority states. This study is limited by its reliance on document-based sources and by the fluid, rapidly evolving nature of regional conflict dynamics; future research could address these constraints by developing a comparative indicator panel of policy signals combined with elite interviews, or by employing an event-history analysis linking official statements to moments of military escalation.

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