

Turkey under the AKP: Neither a European nor a Regional Power (Part 2)

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Articles & Testimony

Read [part 1 \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1518\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1518) and [part 3 \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1524\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC06.php?CID=1524).

Although the incumbent Justice and Development Party, or AKP, substantively dropped European Union membership as a top priority in 2005 and has since turned its attention to Turkey's Middle Eastern ties, it continues to allege that the accession process is of major importance.

However, herein lies the paradox inherent in the AKP's purportedly dual-thronged foreign policy: a categorically activist foreign policy in the Middle East and a concurrent commitment to EU accession are incompatible. In essence, everything cannot be a top priority. No country has ever gotten into the EU without making membership a top domestic and foreign policy priority, let alone while pursuing certain foreign policy goals that directly contradict those of the EU.

The AKP and Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

In 2005, the AKP made a 180-degree turn in Turkey's Middle East policy, moving closer to Iran and its proxies, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Sudan. An ideological view of the world, rather than religious sympathies, motivates this policy. Essentially, Mr. Erdogan and his government held that Samuel Huntington correctly perceived a clash of civilizations, and that Turkey's place is on the side of the Islamists, not the West.

For instance, in his opus *Strategic Depth*, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu wrote, "Turkey's traditionally strong ties with the West represent a process of alienation." Unfortunately, *Strategic Depth* has not been translated into English, though European policymakers would do well to read it to understand Ankara's new *weltanschauung*. The work's executive summary answers many questions about the AKP's foreign policy: "Since the end of the Ottoman Empire, Muslims have gotten the short end of the stick, and the AKP is here to correct all of that."

The AKP will not correct all wrongs against Muslims, though. This is because Islamism -- a political ideology that sees Muslims in perpetual conflict with the West and with "non-believers" -- and not Islam, guides the AKP's foreign policy. Ankara will therefore favor other Islamists over Muslims who do not share their Manichean worldview. Thus, the party will forgive and even defend the ills of Islamist regimes against fellow-Muslims, such as the Sudanese genocide of Darfur or Tehran's suppression of its own population. Likewise, it will support Islamist Hamas and its violent goals, but not the secular Palestinian Authority or the peaceful Palestinian cause of statehood.

This selective solidarity also applies to ills committed against Muslims by non-Muslims, as long as those non-Muslims are anti-European. It exists because political Islam has made the strategic decision that the enemy of its enemy is its friend. Hence, Russia will get a pass regardless of how many Chechens it kills. Ankara, though, will always singularly target Israel, because the AKP adheres to the Islamist view that the Jewish state as such -- irrespective of its specific borders or policies -- will always be a sore in the "Muslim world."

Permitting this Islamist catalyst to exist within the Middle East's various conflicts produces devastating results for Europe. Because the AKP views everything through the lens of civilizational conflict, it cannot be an impartial mediator. This becomes clear when the AKP quickly becomes an advocate for the Islamist side when it is allowed to interject itself between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, or between Europe and Iran.

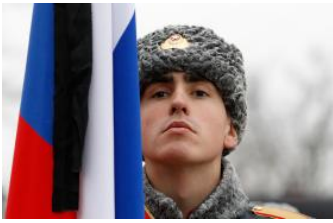
Since approximately 90 percent of Turks do not read or write languages other than Turkish, many see the world as reported to them and debated by their government. So, after eight years of increasingly authoritarian and dominant AKP rule at home, many Turks too now view the world through the Islamist perspective of a civilizational clash. It will take a spirited effort to dislodge this popular conception and restore the widespread faith in a European destiny for Turkey.

* This column originally appeared in *Limes* (Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica).

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