

The AKP's Hamas Policy III: Countering Radicalization

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Articles & Testimony

For Turks today, after seven years of propaganda, Hamas appears to be a good organization as it has been a guest in Istanbul seven times and has had multiple contacts with the government. It even has fundraisers in Turkey. Therefore, one should not expect today that the Turks would oppose Hamas' vision or policies. This would be the case especially with young people in their teens or twenties who have come of age under the AKP.

Various Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood meetings in Istanbul show the efforts of the AKP government and its supporters to cultivate a virtual network, usually funded by government money. These meetings held for any occasion, from a call to jihad to a call to save the environment, act as platforms to bring Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood members to Turkey. The meetings fulfill two additional purposes. They expose Turks to a worldview of "good Hamas versus evil Israel," while whitewashing Hamas' violent actions. Secondly, the meetings bring Hamas and Muslim Brotherhood members from across the world and connect them with the Turks, promoting the notion that these people and groups all belong to the new, politically-defined "Muslim world" whose charge is to fight Israel and oppose its policies and presence in the Middle East.

One could look at the rise of pro-Hamas and anti-Israeli sentiments in Turkey and dismiss them as a problem pertaining to Israel, and not to the United States. Others might even add that anti-Semitism in Turkey is not an American problem. Both of these approaches are short-sighted. Islamist thinking, as well as anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiments are all closely linked. The Islamist thinking goes along the following lines: "The Jews are evil, therefore Israel is evil. The Jews control America, and therefore America is evil."

This thinking is the background to the post- September 11 call that all Muslims should unite around the new and politically-charged Muslim world to oppose Israel and the United States. The problem in Turkey is not that the country's foreign policy towards the West is changing, for such changes can be reversed under a new government, but rather that under the AKP, Turkish attitudes towards Jews and Americans, and Israel and America are changing. In the Manichean post-September 11 world, once the Turks cross the line from the West to the "Muslim world" such changes may prove to be irreversible.

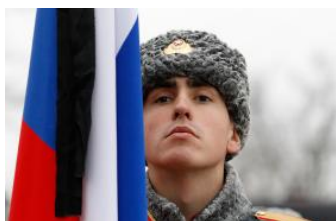
One suggestion for countering the transformation of Turkish public attitudes is a zero tolerance policy by the United States and Israel on the related anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric and meetings sponsored, funded and nurtured by the government. Just as the United States and Israel do not put Turks in a negative light in publicly-funded shows or international meetings, the Turkish government should not be doing the same about the United States or Israel. This is really not asking a lot. It's basically saying: "Do as we do, and not as we wouldn't."

A second suggestion would be calling out on American Muslims, European Muslims, and Muslims elsewhere to recognize that the spread of anti-Western, anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli and anti-American sentiments is a manufactured and politically-masterminded process. If Muslims do not recognize this problem now, then down the road as more and more people adopt these sentiments, eventually others, including those in the West will forget that the spread of such attitudes is a politically-manipulated process. The danger here is that some of these people might then actually turn and blame all this on Islam's reputation. People who deny that radicalization is a politically-manufactured process are actually helping give Islam a bad reputation.

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