

## When Islamist Foreign Policies Hurt Muslims

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Articles & Testimony

**W**hat is an Islamist foreign policy, exactly? Is it identifying with Muslims and their suffering, or is it identifying with anti-Western regimes even at the cost of Muslims' best interests? Turkey's foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, government demonstrates that far from protecting Muslims and their interests, it is the promotion of a la carte morals -- bashing the West and supporting anti-Western regimes, even when the latter hurts Muslims.

AKP leader and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is scheduled to meet today with President Obama in Washington. This is a chance for Obama, who visited Ankara in April in a charm offensive to win Turkish hearts, to have a discussion with Erdogan about Turkey's ill-conceived foreign policy, which is bad for the West and for Muslims.

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP has dramatically changed Turkey's foreign policy. The party has let Ankara's ties with pro-Western Azerbaijan, Georgia and Israel deteriorate and has started to ignore Europe. Meanwhile, the AKP has built ties with anti-Western states such as Sudan while making friends with Ankara's erstwhile adversaries, including Russia, Iran and Syria, and positioning itself as Hamas' patron.

It wasn't always this way. After casting its lot with the United States in 1946, Ankara collaborated with the West against the communist Soviet Union, Baathist Syria and Islamist Iran. When communism ended, Ankara worked to spread Western values, including free markets and democracy, in the former Soviet Union, becoming close with pro-Western Azerbaijan and Georgia. Turkey also developed a close relationship with Israel, based on shared values and security interests.

The AKP has now turned Turkish foreign policy on its head -- bashing the West for transgressions and absolving anti-Western regimes of their sins.

A comparison of the AKP's Israel and Sudan policies helps define Turkey's Islamist foreign policy. Since coming to power, the AKP has not only built a close political and economic relationship with Khartoum but also defended Sudanese leader Omar Hassan Bashir's atrocities in Darfur.

Last month, Erdogan said: "I know that Bashir is not committing genocide in Darfur, because Bashir is a Muslim and a Muslim can never commit genocide." What? The International Criminal Court indicted Bashir and has called for his arrest for war crimes in the Darfur conflict, in which 300,000 Sudanese -- mostly Muslims -- have died.

The AKP's Sudan policy stands in stark contrast to its Israel policy. At a World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, in January, Erdogan chided Israeli President Shimon Peres, Jews and Israelis about the Gaza war, for "knowing well how to kill people." Erdogan then walked off the panel. Days later, he hosted the Sudanese vice president in Ankara.

This is an ideological view of the world, guided not by religion but by a distorted premise that Islamist and anti-Western regimes are always right even when they are criminal, such as when they are killing Muslims. And in this view, Western states and non-Muslims are always wrong, even when they act in self-defense against Islamist regimes.

Such an a la carte morality in foreign policy is also apparent in the AKP's approach to Russia. Russian violence in Chechnya continues, yet the AKP seems not to be bothered by the Chechen Muslims' suffering. Despite Russia's northern Caucasus policies, the rapport between Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Erdogan and commercial ties have cemented Turkish-Russian ties. Russia has become Turkey's No. 1 trading partner, replacing Germany.

The ties between Ankara and Moscow come at a cost to the West and its allies. During Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, the AKP did not stand with Tbilisi, sacrificing traditional Turkish support for Georgia in favor of commercial relations with Russia. The party is also working with Russia in building South Stream, a pipeline that undermines the Nabucco pipeline that would have connected Azerbaijan to the West, abandoning both Azerbaijan and Europe.

Another example of this harmful foreign policy is the government's stance on Iran's nuclearization, a crucial issue for the West. In October, Erdogan defended Iran's nuclear program, saying that the problem in the Middle East is Israel's nuclear capacity rather than Iran's program. Earlier that month, he called Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad his friend and dismissed the leaders of France and Germany.

Far from helping the West, the AKP's foreign policy is challenging its regional interests, and this is also bad for Muslims. When Iranian demonstrators took to the streets in June to contest the election outcome, the AKP rushed to the defense of Ahmadinejad's regime, congratulating him on his "electoral success" while pro-Ahmadinejad forces were beating peaceful protesters.

Instead of supporting Western values, the AKP and its Islamist foreign policy undermine such values and the West, which in turn hurts ordinary Muslims from Darfur to Chechnya to Iran.

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