

It's clear that Turkey has imposed Islamic rule on both its domestic and foreign policies - opinion

By now it must be apparent that Turkey has joined forces with Russia's Vladimir Putin, Iran's Ebrahim Raisi, China's Xi Jinping and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman.

By **ROBERT ELLIS**

Copyright @ 2022 <https://www.ipost.com/opinion/article-724530>



PEOPLE GATHER at a memorial in Istanbul to the victims of last month's deadly blast at Gezi Park.

(photo credit: DILARA SENKAYA/REUTERS)

Both the Biden administration and the GOP might be lulled into believing that Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan could be the honest broker they need to act as go-between between the United States and Russia. But this is not the case.

By now it must be apparent that Turkey has joined forces with Russia's [Vladimir Putin](#), Iran's [Ebrahim Raisi](#), China's [Xi Jinping](#) and Saudi Arabia's [Mohammed bin Salman](#).

When the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, it presented itself as moderate, Westward-looking and neoliberal, and the US and the European Union were taken in. As then-secretary of state Condoleezza Rice gushed, the AKP was “a government dedicated to pulling Turkey West toward Europe.”

The AKP made use of EU conditionality to obtain economic benefits, but with the show trials against secular opponents from 2008 to 2013 and the crackdown on Istanbul's Gezi Park protests, it showed its real face.

The same year, the head of the AKP's Istanbul branch made it clear that “the new Turkey” the party was building would not feature a future that its liberal supporters could accept or desire.



TURKEY'S PRESIDENT Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks to journalists at the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, earlier this month. (credit: G20 Media Center/Reuters)

European parliamentarian Andrew Duff, a former AKP supporter, concluded that the AKP had replaced Kemalism with Islamism. His Dutch colleague, Marietje Schaake, bewailed, "Our dream of a European Turkey has turned into a nightmare, and it is time for a wake-up call."

It has become clear that Turkey has imposed Islamic rule not only in domestic policy (including the economy) but also in foreign policy. In 2001, Turkish Prof. Ahmet Davutoglu – who became Erdogan's chief adviser, foreign minister and prime minister – posited in his key work *Strategic Depth* that Turkey's foreign policy should be based on engagement with countries with which it shared a common past and geography. This policy came to be dubbed "neo-Ottomanism."

Davutoglu considered the century of republican rule "a parenthesis" and aimed to restore Turkey's hegemony over the Balkans, Caucasus and [Middle East](#). In an address at an AKP conference, he spoke of the birth of a global power and the mission to create a new world order (*nizam-i âlem*), an Ottoman concept synonymous with Islamic rule.

Davutoglu, however, flew too close to the Sun and was toppled in an AKP plot. In October 2012, Islamic scholar Ibrahim Kalin, who is now Erdogan's chief adviser and spokesperson, gave a keynote speech at the Istanbul Forum, where he spoke of a new geopolitical framework that rejects the Western-centric political and economic order.

He also rejected the European model of secular democracy, politics and pluralism. This is in keeping with the views expressed by Putin at a plenary session of the Valdai Club in October.

Qatar Forum

AT THE Qatar Forum in March, Kalin repeated his call for a new global security architecture. Political scientist Nuray Mert has dismissed neo-Ottomanism as irredentist nationalism. Indeed, Erdogan has talked of revoking the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, which defined Turkey's present borders, in favor of the National Pact (*Misak-i Milli*), a decision by the last Ottoman Parliament in 1920 to include parts of Syria, Greece and Iraq.

Four years ago, Erdogan's head of international relations, Ayse Sözen Usluer, stated that Turkey for the last 10-15 years had felt no need to choose between the West and the East, or between the US and Russia. She emphasized Turkey's strategic importance and maintained there was no axis shift.

Now there is. Against a backdrop of estrangement from the US and the EU, Erdogan in September on his return from a Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Samarkand declared it was his intention to join. Membership of "Rogue NATO" will undoubtedly put a strain on Turkey's relations with NATO, which are already tenuous because of Turkey's strengthened economic ties with Russia and Putin's plan to make Turkey a hub for the transporting of Russian gas to Europe.

At the same time, Erdogan cites “security concerns” to force Sweden to hand over political refugees in return for Turkey’s approval of that country’s NATO membership. The Istanbul bombing has given Erdogan a pretext to play the national security card and justify airstrikes on Kurdish positions in Iraq and northeastern Syria.

He is also planning a fourth incursion into Syria to boost the president’s approval ratings ahead of next year’s elections. US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Menendez has condemned these airstrikes as not the actions of an ally.

In connection with the Biden administration’s plan to conclude an F-16 deal with Turkey, Menendez has warned, “I think the administration has to stop seeing from the aspirational part of what we would like Turkey to be, and realize that Turkey is under Erdogan.”

In October, Turkey’s Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, a hard-liner and contender for the post as president, delivered a speech that was indicative of the government’s mindset.

“Allah will grant us this,” he said. “We will design the new world order. We caught this opportunity now. Turkey is no longer the old [Turkey](#). Our alliance [between the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party] is on the path to Allah.

“After 2023 [when the next presidential and parliamentary elections will be held], we will move so fast that they [the West] will have to eat our dust. Are you ready to teach those [Western] ambassadors [in Turkey], the plotting US and Europe, a lesson? Are you ready to make the 21st century Turkey’s century?”

Last year, Putin signed a law paving the way for two more terms as president, and in China, Xi Jinping has secured a third term as president. In Turkey, there is the possibility that Erdogan will secure a further term as president. With the talk of a new constitution, “the new Turkey” could also become an Islamic republic.

As he demonstrated in his July meeting in Tehran with Putin and Raisi, Erdogan is well on his way to becoming a permanent member of the despots club.

The writer is an international adviser at the Research Institute for European and American Studies in Athens.