

# The Turkish Temptation

## The Erdogan government shifts its allegiances to anti-Western Islam.

Wallstreet Journal | Updated Oct. 30, 2009 12:01 a.m. ET

It's been a decade since Turkey threatened to invade Syria because Damascus was harboring Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish PKK terrorist group. "We will say 'shalom' to the Israelis on the Golan Heights" is how one Turkish newspaper then described the country's mood, capturing its attitude toward Syrians and Israelis alike.

Times change—and so do countries. Earlier this month, Turkey cancelled an annual multinational air force exercise because Israel was scheduled to participate in it, despite historically close ties between the Turkish and Israeli militaries. In a recent interview with Britain's Guardian newspaper, Turkish Prime Recep Tayyip Erdogan said of Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that "there is no doubt he is our friend."

Mr. Erdogan was also among the first to offer Ahmadinejad a congratulatory call after June's fraudulent elections and has called Iran's nuclear program "peaceful and humanitarian." As for Syria, relations have never been warmer: The two countries are even planning joint military exercises.

Nations do not have the luxury of picking their neighbors, and the Turks can certainly be forgiven for not wanting to be at daggers drawn along several hundred miles of common borders. But what's happened to Turkey's foreign policy—and the values that inform those policies—since Mr. Erdogan and his Islamist AKP party came to power in 2003 looks more like a fundamental shift in Turkey's strategic priorities than it does a mere relaxing of regional tensions.

In January, for instance, Mr. Erdogan publicly rebuked Shimon Peres at a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, calling the Israeli President a "liar" and saying—in connection to the war in Gaza—that "when it comes to killing, you know well how to kill." Soon thereafter, Mr. Erdogan hosted a dinner in honor of Ali Osman Taha, the vice president of Sudan. Apparently, there were no lectures about Darfur.

Nor has Israel been the only country in the Middle East affected by Turkey's changing attitudes. As analyst Soner Cagaptay of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy notes, "the AKP's foreign policy has not promoted sympathy toward all Muslim states. Rather, the party has promoted solidarity with Islamist, anti-Western regimes (Qatar and Sudan, for

example) while dismissing secular, pro-Western Muslim governments (Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia)." That also goes among the Palestinians, where Mr. Erdogan has called on the world to recognize Hamas while being dismissive of Mahmoud Abbas, the Authority's more secular-minded president.

In other words, Mr. Erdogan's turn against Israel is symptomatic of a broader shift in Turkish policy, one that cannot bode well for core U.S. interests. As a secular Muslim state, Turkey has been a pillar of NATO and a bulwark against the political radicalism (Communist, Baathist, Islamist) of its various neighbors. Now Mr. Erdogan may be gambling that Turkey's future lies at the head of the Muslim world, rather than at the tail of its Western counterpart.

Perhaps none of this should be all that surprising, given how long Europe has brushed off Turkish ambitions to join its Union. One may hope that the Turks, who have long been proud of their traditions of secularism, tolerance, freedom, and as a bridge between East and West, may not be so tempted to trade them in for darker glories.