

Turkey's bid to return to Ottoman-era glory endangers Israel and the region

Israel Kasnett / Sep. 11, 2020

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has high ambitions. He wants to take his country back to what he perceives as the glory days of the Ottoman Empire, but the leader, who has been described as "pugnacious" and has been at the pinnacle of power since 2002, appears to be leading the country down the wrong path as he quashes secularism, supports radical Islamism, suppresses democratic reforms and adopts a forceful foreign-policy approach that aims to assert Turkish hegemony in the region.

[...]

Gallia Lindenstrauss, a senior research fellow at the **Institute for National Security Studies** who specializes in Turkish foreign policy, told JNS that Erdoğan's actions are influenced by the "transformation of the international system from a unipolar system to a multipolar one."

The perception that the United States is planning to significantly reduce its military presence in the Middle East—announced by U.S. President Donald Trump this week—and the power vacuums that have emerged as one of the consequences of the Arab upheavals "are causing several actors, including Turkey, to act in a more assertive manner," she said.

Lindenstrauss noted that Turkey's bellicose behavior stems from its perception that "in the current international context, acting aggressively doesn't necessarily incur major costs from the global powers and hence the temptation to act this way is greater," she said.

With Erdoğan's Islamist identity and close ties with Muslim Brotherhood, Qatar and Hamas, this triangle seems dangerous for Israel. Is it a real threat?

"After the fall of [former Egyptian President] Mohammed Morsi, Turkey became the leader of the Muslim brotherhood axis in the Middle East," she said. "This is a cause of concern in Israel, and there is now greater awareness of Hamas military activity on Turkish soil."

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