

Is Turkey leading the Erosion of a Western-led Global Order?

Ankara is leading many in calling out the West's double standards in Gaza

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Soon after the US and Britain started bombing Houthi targets in Yemen earlier this month, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced the strikes, arguing that western powers sought to make the Red Sea "a sea of blood".

Given Ankara's stance on Israel-Gaza, few were surprised by the comment, or by Turkey's leader the next day saying his government would provide evidence in support of [South Africa's genocide case against Israel](#) at the International Court of Justice.

What has been a bit of an eye-opener, in contrast, is how mainstream such talk has become in just a matter of weeks. In early 2024, anti-westernism is taking over the geopolitical zeitgeist, and it's easy to see why.

It's not just the [more than 25,000 Gazans killed](#). Although now that Israel has killed more than 20 times as many people as Hamas killed in its horrific Oct 7 assault, that data point is beyond troubling. It's not just that most of those killed have been women and children, sick and elderly, presumably innocent of any crimes and unconnected to Hamas.

It's not just the nearly two million displaced Gazans, many of whom embark on daily quests for shelter and safety. It's not just that famine looms, as most of Gaza remains off-limits to aid even as a record nine of 10 Gazans go hungry, or that the World Health Organisation estimates that in the coming weeks the death toll from sickness and starvation could surpass the number of Gazans killed in Israeli strikes.

It's that amid all this, the world's most powerful country has essentially stood idly by as Israel has blocked aid and water delivery and refused to even discuss Palestinian statehood, while vowing to continue the war despite vast condemnation. "We are continuing the war

until the end,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last week. “Nobody will stop us – not The Hague, not the axis of evil and not anybody else.”

They have long had their suspicions, but in light of the carnage in Gaza, many in the Muslim world and the Global South, along with liberal-minded people elsewhere, increasingly believe the West cares more about Europeans, like Ukrainians, than Middle Easterners. Recent articles [in this newspaper](#) and a slew of top western outlets underscore this growing perception.

“The West needs to value all human life,” a former UN deputy secretary general urged last week in *Foreign Policy*. “Any vestige of moral authority has been lost forever,” a *Guardian* column asserted on the weekend, echoing a frequent Erdogan talking point.

“Public opinion across the Middle East, the Global South, and even the West increasingly regards the conflict as the consequence of a decades-long occupation rather than as a response to Islamic terrorism,” two top analysts argued last week in *Foreign Affairs*.

Criticisms of Israel and the US often centre on occupation and colonisation, which has helped revive discussions about past atrocities – and even genocide – committed in the West.

Of course, westerners have no monopoly on genocide. Rights groups say that in his 1988 Anfal campaign, Saddam Hussein [committed genocide](#) against the Kurds. ISIS faced widespread charges of genocide for its killing of Christian Yazidis a decade ago. We humans are all too familiar with genocide.

But right now, the gap between the West’s purported values and principles and the reality in Gaza is so vast and glaring it’s impossible to ignore. Dragoman, a respected Muslim-American analyst who recently left the US for Istanbul, says seeing his homeland’s tacit support for Israel has remade his worldview. “That I ever promoted the virtues of the West is a mark of shame for me,” he wrote last week.

He vowed to look more critically at western writing on China and Russia and consider the merits of those states. China, for its part, has taken a balanced policy stance on Israel-Gaza, likely hoping to leverage growing dissatisfaction with the US into closer ties with the Global South and Muslim-majority states.

“I see no other rational position for any self-respecting Muslim except to work to hasten the demise of West’s ability to project power internationally,” argued Dragoman, adding that it “behooves Muslims to shift their gaze eastward, where the new world is rapidly rising.”

Lebanon, traditionally one of the more US-friendly Arab states, suggests this may already be happening. Support for Hezbollah among Lebanese Shiites [has gone from](#) two of three in 2020 to 9 of 10 today, according to polling by The Washington Institute, a think tank based in the American capital. More than a third of Lebanese Sunnis now view the Hassan Nasrallah-led group positively, a stunning increase from 6 per cent, and the share of Christians who accept Hezbollah, the same poll found, has nearly doubled (16 per cent to 29 per cent).

Nothing, it seems, is better for the Palestinian cause than unfathomable Palestinian suffering. It’s Alan Kurdi all over again, and it’s not just Muslims. Polls have found younger Americans – younger voters, in an election year – [to be increasingly](#) pro-Palestinian.

To what extent might politicians begin [shifting their positions](#), and might we see increased radicalisation in the region and beyond in the months ahead? These are important questions. But I'm reminded of a clash of civilisations advocate known to [parrot the views](#) of Turkey's governing AKP.

"Humanity has been the West's colony for centuries – it has been fooled and taken hostage," Turkish columnist Ibrahim Karagul wrote in April 2022.

"The world must refrain from being dragged into another disaster for the West," Karagul went on. "Colonised countries are standing up against their old bosses...The world, all of humanity, must unite to stop the West."

Whether this anti-western shift will be a flash in the pan or usher in a new world order, we can't yet say. But it's a safe bet that Turkey will be in the centre of it all.

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