

Sympathy for the Turkish devil



The American commentariat

is shocked, shocked , to discover that Turkey has abandoned the Western alliance for an adventurous bid to become the dominant Muslim power in the Middle East. Tom Friedman of the New York Times suggested on June 15 that “President [Barack] Obama should invite him for a weekend at Camp David to clear the air before US-Turkey relations get where they’re going – over a cliff.” Friedman blames the European Community for rejecting Turkey’s membership bid which, he says, was a “key factor prompting Turkey to move closer to Iran and the Arab world”.

But it is not quite so simple. Friedman and the conventional wisdom are wrong, as usual. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is behaving dreadfully, to the point that a group of retired senior Turkish diplomats denounced him for “neo-Ottomanism”. But Turkey has not moved closer to Iran, except in tactical diplomatic terms. The problem is more subtle: America’s blunders in Iraq gave Iran the chance to become a regional hegemon, and Turkey must vie with Iran for this role as a matter of self-preservation.

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