While the European Union process seemed to advance in fits and starts, Mr. Erdogan simultaneously began the process of establishing his Islamic credentials. The first major step to capture world attention was Mr. Erdogan's very public storming out of the 2010 Davos Summit after publicly berating the Israelis. He became an instant hero to all those who had watched in frustration, over decades, the continued destruction of the Palestinian homeland. Mr. Erdogan followed his Davos words by organizing the ill-fated Mavi Marmara flotilla to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza. This was a clever move, since anyone with a scintilla of empathy is moved by the suffering of innocent Palestinians at the hands of Israel's Zionist leaders. Mr. Erdogan ensured that the Mavi Marmara flotilla was peppered with international journalists to record the inevitable Israeli overreaction. There were only two possible outcomes of the flotilla adventure: either Israel would show the world its brutality and stop the flotilla or the flotilla would break the blockade make it to Gaza. Either way, Mr. Erdogan would be a hero.

Perhaps Mr. Erdogan really thought he could help the Palestinians, but the flotilla debacle seemed to fall neatly into a pattern of broader efforts to attract attention to himself as the only Muslim leader ready to take real action to challenge the Israelis' disgraceful treatment of the Palestinians. If so, it was an effective start, but it needed a follow-up beyond merely repeating the flotilla disaster. That particular drama played out to Mr. Erdogan's advantage in terms of burnishing his anti-Zionist, Islamic credentials, even if the Palestinians gained little or nothing from the action-packed, high-seas Mavi Marmara drama.

Mr. Erdogan needed to place Turkey in a position of power along Israel's land border if he was going to progress in the eyes of the Islamic community as a true savior of the Palestinians. This required finding a government among the "confrontation states" along Israel's border that would be willing to forget the dreaded Ottoman legacy and ignore the perception of Turkish discrimination against and sense of superiority over Arabs. The problem was that given Turkey's widely perceived disregard for Arabs, it would be political suicide for any sitting Arab government to allow Mr. Erdogan and Turkey that much credit, access and power. Therefore, Mr. Erdogan needed to find a sitting Arab government to replace with a regime loyal and indebted to Turkey. Enter Syria.

Unfortunately, just as the USA did not consider the welfare of Iraq's people in deposing Saddam Hussein in Iraq and attempting to establish a base from which to harass Iran, Mr. Erdogan's government seems prepared to fight Assad's regime to the last innocent Syrian, of any religion, ethnic group or sect, in order to establish a base on Israel's border. Over 140,000 have died thus far, by some estimates, and the carnage continues. Mr. Erdogan, meanwhile, has also caused a small crisis in Saudi Arabia. The world has watched a panicked Saudi government try to prevent Mr. Erdogan's meteoric rise as a Muslim leader by seeking to take over as the lead champion of the Syrian rebels after the fact. The result has not only failed miserably in terms of the Saudi image but may well have helped further strengthen radical terrorists in Syria who could eventually become a threat to even the Saudi regime.

Amidst all this, while the Saudis look alternately feckless and extremist, Mr. Erdogan is being touted as the savior of Syria's populace. In light of the positive press portraying Mr. Erdogan as a peacemaker, it should come as no surprise that Mr. Erdogan seems bent upon secretly undermining peace talks that do not favor his intended future
Syrian candidates. If Mr. Erdogan were to succeed in convincing the West to do his dirty work for him and replace Assad with a Turkish-backed puppet regime on Israel’s border, it would be the ultimate triumph for Mr. Erdogan as a true modern-day Muslim Caliph.

The irony of the threat Mr. Erdogan poses to established Arab Muslim leaders in Saudi Arabia might be excusable, or even ridiculous, if so many Syrians were not suffering. Mr. Erdogan’s egomaniacal ambition to triumph as The Muslim Leader already has caused over 140,000 deaths and risks pitting Europe and the US against Russia and Iran, and destabilizing Saudi Arabia while distracting attention from continuous Israeli annexation of Palestinian land. It is a sad state of affairs for all concerned, except Mr. Erdogan, who is basking in the attention and, most appallingly, for hard-core, anti-Arab Zionists, who have carte blanche to act as they please amidst the Syrian chaos.

_Gwenyth Todd a former Adviser to President Clinton, expert in international security policy, she hold M.A from Georgetown University, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”_