

TURKEY Tr-diplomacy

Iraqi Shiite cleric thanks Turkish PM for Ashura remarks

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Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has thanked the Turkish prime minister for his Ashura speech on the day Shiites mourn the killing of Imam Hussein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed.

Iraq's Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr has sent a letter to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, thanking him for his Ashura speech, a day of mourning for Shiites commemorating the killing of Imam Hussein, grandson of Mohammed.

Erdoğan said the killings in Karbala had not been divisive, but helped foster brotherhood in the Muslim world. Erdoğan's messages at Ashura commemorations in Halkalı came after debates on Turkey's support of Sunni groups during efforts to form a new government in Iraq.

"You have touched the hearts of each and every Muslim. You have done what no other Muslim leader has done," al-Sadr told Erdoğan in his letter.

The 10-day rituals commemorate the killing of Imam Hussein, a grandson of the Prophet Mohammed, by armies of the caliph Yazid in 680 AD in Karbala. Tradition holds that the revered imam was decapitated and his body mutilated.

Erdoğan said in his Halkalı speech that "martyrdom of Hussein was not a farewell but a reuniting, it was not an end but a start... Everyone should notice that those who try to take advantage of Karbala by marking it as a point of division or hostility for Muslims are people who betray the legacy of the Prophet's grandson."

"Karbala's pain is still alive in our hearts, even after 1370 years," Erdoğan said.

The anti-American al-Sadr now represents one of the main players in Iraqi politics, following an uneasy detente reached between Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the Sadrists several months ago to form a government after years of fighting each other.

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