



Political Islam Online

Political Islam and the Un-Turkish Experience

In an article entitled “Un-Turkish Misgivings” *Mshari Al-Zaydi* rejects the Islamists’ characterization of the victory achieved by the conservative AK Party¹ in Turkey as a political win for Islamic fundamentalism, a claim he considers unsupported.

How should Politics be viewed in Islamic Societies

Questioning how the Turkish experience should be viewed within the concept of “political Islam,” *Al-Zaydi* takes issue with the changing and conflicting interpretations of that term by Islamist thinkers, exemplified by the usage adopted by sheikh *Muhammad Al-‘Abdah*.² *Al-Zaydi* asks whether politics should be governed by uncompromising pure religious idealism, as presently called for by *Al-‘Abdah*, or whether practicality should dictate the function and application of politics. *Al-Zaydi*, tracing the historical meaning of the word “politics” within historical Islam, finds that politics is a practical science balancing worldly interests and equations without a heavenly Islamic purpose. Thus, he concludes that politics and religion are, necessarily, separate.

The Turkish Application

Al-Zaydi reflects that Islamic doctrine is, by nature, immune from alteration while politics is constantly changing to adapt to current reality. The Turkish president elect *Abdullah Gul* recognized that, given this important distinction between the Islamic religion and politics, mixing the two results in harm to both. The author considers that this statement of principle by *Gul* is a fundamental belief rather than a superficial tactic. **Gul, like Erdogan, is a Muslim engaged in politics rather than an Islamist using politics to fulfill a deeply religious ideological agenda.**

The author supports the middle ground. Islamists believe that religion and politics are inseparable; similarly, the Turkish military had asserted that devout practicing Moslems should not be involved in politics at all. In contrast, the *Al-Zaydi* urges Arab

¹ Justice and Development Party headed by Erdogan who shifted from religiously-affiliated politics to concentrate on democratic and economic reforms necessary for Turkey to join the European Union.

² *Al-Abdah* was born in Syria and graduated from Damascus University with a degree in Law. He co-founded *Albayan* magazine and became its chief editor from 1986 until 1993. *Al-‘Abdah* resides in London where he presently writes, mostly in “Islamselect,” and where he continues to have a relatively large Islamists’ followers particularly in the Arabian Peninsula.

Islamists, who rejoiced over the AK Party's ascendance to power, to reexamine this distinction between religion and politics and to recognize that the Turkish success is further evidence that it is possible to be a fervent Moslem leader without adopting a total Islamic agenda in governance.

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Editor's Note: On the other side of the Atlantic, Jacques Bernlinerblau's article, "The Paradox of American Nonbelief"³ (Washington Post, Sept. 18, 2007), raised a similar issue. Bernlinerblau argues that "nonbelievers" (ironically is a term mostly used in Islamic references) should not be surprised that the 2008 democratic candidates are pandering to "believers" who nevertheless favor strict separation of Church and State. Given the success of the AK party in Turkey using just such a strategy, he may have a point.

³ http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/georgetown/2007/09/the_paradox_of_american_nonbel.html