



Turkey – A Disappointment for Islamists

The AK party's ascendance to power and the election of *Abdullah Gul* to the presidency were the result of a strange dichotomy within Turkey. On the one hand are the secular parties of Turkey, which fear the loss of Turkish sovereignty and are fighting against national disintegration. On the other hand is the Islamic-leaning AK party which firmly believes in EU membership and has a globalized view of the world. Contrary to the "modernization paradigm," the more religiously-oriented sector of Turkish society is more internationally-leaning and challenges the "clash of civilizations"¹ theory used to explain much of the Middle East's tension with the West post 9/11. Immediately following the Turkish elections, Islamists throughout the Middle East naturally interpreted the results as a sign of the revival and expansion of Islam. Some Arab analysts were also predicting what they called the integration of Turkey within the Arab sphere. As the saying goes, however, a picture is worth a thousand words.

As a case in point, on Thursday, the Muslim world awoke to this photo on the front page of *Al-Jazeera*. It



was taken at a meeting last week between the Presidents of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Istanbul, under the watchful eye of the Turkish President. The event was infused with even greater importance by the fact that Turkey became the first country to ask both leaders to make a joint address, before parliament no less. The conservative newspaper *Al-Jazeera* acknowledged the importance of the event but sounded an alarm as well. The paper quoted the Lebanese analyst *Muhammad Nour Al-Din*, who questioned Turkey's motives in arranging the meeting and speculated that there was nothing tangible for Perez and Abbas to discuss. According to

Nour Al-Din, the significance of the meeting was not in anything discussed, but rather in what it said about the new role Turkey is beginning to play in the current regional conflicts. That role, however, is not the one that Islamists had hoped for after the AK party came to power.

Al-Jazeera also noted that Turkey's economic role goes hand-in-hand with its political role. The leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Turkey signed an agreement to establish an industrial complex on the West bank under Turkish financial and commercial supervision. *Nour Al-Din* emphasized Turkey's unique position as the only country that maintains strong relations with Israel, Iran, Syria and the other Arab countries, and how that position would translate into a larger Turkish role in the region. *Al-Jazeera* preferred, however, to focus on what it titled as "Turkey's other objectives," and to highlight remarks by the Turkish analyst, *Orkhan Muhammad 'Ali*, suggesting that one of Turkey's main objectives is to purchase advanced reconnaissance planes from Israel to protect its border against Turkish rebels.

It is not surprising that the few commentaries on the meeting in *Al Jazeera* were consistently critical of Turkey and demonstrated that the brief honeymoon between the Islamists and the Turkish government was short lived. Perhaps the Islamists sense that the action of the Turkish leadership, like the recent visit of the Saudi king to the Vatican, may signal broad rejection of Islamist policies in favor of moderate Islam.

Source: *Al-Jazeera* – November 15th, 2007

<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/4A7EF27F-4CFC-4F28-85E9-42E4D8989118.htm>

¹ The theory was first enunciated by Samuel P. Huntington in his article in *Foreign Affairs*, summer of 1993 and the term first used by Bernard Lewis in reference to Islam.

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