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SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

The Conflicts of Secularization and Islam in Turkey

A Thesis Submitted to

The Faculty of the International Studies Major

In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of

BA in International Studies

by

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Newport RI

February, 2010

Abstract

An examination of the religion of Islam and its unique characteristics, especially those that may relate to the politics and government of the Republic of Turkey, assist in understanding the relationship between the two. The 99% Muslim population affects the country politically and socially. There are many aspects of Sunni Islam, the majority in Turkey, that conflict with the secular nature of Turkey. Despite its apparent differences with the manner in which Turkey is governed, Islam has been able to exist in the country. Although religion is a personal matter, it becomes a concern if one is unable to practice it freely, which has been an issue in Turkey with the headscarf ban and many other reforms made at the formation of the republic. Ataturk was the great influence in Turkey's major secular reforms, and it is these reforms of the past that create challenges today.

This topic is important to the Pell Program because it concerns foreign policy and human rights. The paper will discuss the importance of religion in a democracy because although the two are meant to be separate, it is difficult to keep them completely apart. Turkey is an interesting combination of Muslim faith and democracy. It has been a great presence in the world in the past, and will

continue to be in the future. It is unique in its policies and customs, and has much to teach other nations of the world.

Introduction

“If Muslims were to accept in principle the separation of religion from the domain of public life (which would then become secularized, as it has in the West to an even greater degree since the Renaissance), they would have to abandon the doctrine of Unity that lies at the heart of the Islamic message” (Nasr 113).

Turkey is a secular state, as well as an Islamic one, and the religion has a strong presence in this unique country. It is important to understand the history of Islam and its central teachings in order to recognize its influence in Turkey, as well as its influence in the rest of the world. Islam is a monotheistic religion, similar in that respect to Christianity and Judaism, as all three religions are derived from the same beginnings. Islam began in the Arab world, and quickly spread to cover a great deal of Europe and Asia. Some arguments maintain that at the heart of the religion is the belief in Unity, community, and the Divine Law in all aspects of life, including politics and government. The religion, however, is far more complex and personal than one can learn from an outside perspective. History, personal experiences, location, and many other factors create variations in the religion. Turkey, being a secular government, has challenged the

message of Unity between religion and all aspects of public life that essentialist Islam stresses. There are some ways that Turkey's government has been in opposition to certain essential beliefs of Sunni Islam, which is the religion of 99.8% of the country's population of almost 77 million people ("Turkey"). While changes in Turkey conflict with certain traditions of Islam, they are beneficial to the country politically, and have created opportunities for growth and power. One may argue, however, that secularism can indeed support Islam, depending on the implication of each; or that Turkey is not truly democratic, depending on one's perception.

The four major concepts that shape Turkey's character are Islam, secularism, nationality, and democracy. Islam affects Turkey through the people, while the government affects Turkey through secularism, democracy, and nationality. All are extremely different and while some may work together, others cannot. The quote above suggests that Islam itself cannot be secular; however, the religion has a different meaning to all followers, who should not be grouped into one category. One should not assume that all Muslims hold the same beliefs concerning Islam governing public life. In this sense, Islam can survive in a secular environment, and can be democratic. While Islam and democracy support each other, so do secularism and nationality. Atatürk, the creator of the secular Republic of Turkey, had a goal of creating a sense of nationality and along with it, a country of Turks. There is, however, a continuing problem of the Kurdish people in Turkey, who have their own sense of nationality. Although the concepts of Islam, democracy, secularism, and nationalism seem as though they could be vastly different, Turkey is an example of the four elements attempting to work together to form a successful nation.

History

Sunni Islam

The religion of Islam has a history that begins with the Prophet Muhammad. Born in Mecca in 570, he claimed to receive revelations from God over the course of many years. He later transcribed the revelations into what is known as the Quran, the most vital text in Islam. Another essential text of Islam is a compilation of Muhammad's guidance and teachings called the Hadith, typically perceived as a guide for Muslims to live by. There are various adaptations and translations of the Hadith, and although it is not the word of God, followers revere it as an essential text to the religion. The Quran itself demands that all beings respect the prophet, giving the Hadith an even higher status. Though many translations use varying words, the Quran states that "God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet: O ye that believe! Send ye blessings on Him, and salute him with all respect" ("The Holy Quran – English Translation" 33:56). Also, "human beings can love God only if God loves them, and God loves only the person who loves His Prophet" (Nasr 47). These sources suggest that even though Muhammad is not

divine, since God chose him, others should venerate him, and his teachings ought to be followed.

Included in the Hadith are what are commonly known as the five pillars of Islam. These pillars include the following: stating that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is His messenger; praying five times daily toward Mecca; giving charity to the less fortunate; fasting during Ramadan; and making the pilgrimage to Mecca if able. The Hadith also includes the tradition of wearing modest dress, which may include headscarves for women. It declares Friday as the day of rest, and states that worship should be in Arabic, as it was in Arabic that God supposedly recited the Quran to Muhammad. Once translated from Arabic, the Quran may possibly lose its true meaning.

Muhammad gained a following of believers in Mecca, located in present day Saudi Arabia, and the religion began to spread. He moved to Medina in 622, also in Saudi Arabia, which is where the Prophet died and was buried in 632. The important pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the pillars of Islam, is done to recreate Muhammad's move from one city to the other, known as the hajj.



Source: “Saudi Arabia”

Islam continued after the Prophet’s death, but became divided into two major sections due to a debate over the successor of Muhammad. The Sunnis believe that Abu Bakr, the Prophet’s closest advisor, was the rightful successor of Muhammad, as the community elected him to rule. The Shiites, on the other hand, believe that Ali, the Prophet’s cousin, was to assume power, for he would continue the family lineage. Sunni Muslims make up the majority of the world’s Muslims, as well as the majority in Turkey, while the Shiites are the second largest group.

There are two common views held by Muslims: the fundamentalist and the reformist, also called modernist. Muslim fundamentalists typically believe that religious law is superior to secular law, while modernists wish to synthesize “western philosophical and political thought, scientific-technological progress, and Islam” (Hafez 6). A fundamentalist may believe his or her obedience lies primarily with God, next with

the Holy Prophet, and finally with an authoritative Muslim, as long as his actions are consistent with the Quran and the Prophet (Iqbal). According to this view, secular governments have little to no authority.

The Quran does contain the concept of democracy, citizens must be consulted before any major decisions or policies are created. This could, however, be interpreted as consulting only with the elite, or another small portion of the citizenry (Price). The Quran also commands Muslims to assure religious freedom to all citizens in a secular state, and to protect the places of worship of all faiths (Iqbal). This evidence demonstrates that although some aspects of Islam may be in conflict with secularism, it does not conflict with democracy. In fact, the basis of Islam and democracy appear to be the same, as they both emphasize equality and freedom.

Ottoman Empire

In the Sunni faith, the next elected caliph, or ruler, after Muhammad was Abu Bakr. Although he only ruled for two years beginning in 632, he made many contributions, such as controlling the tribal uprisings in Medina. The second caliph, Umar, came into power in 634, with an incentive to preserve Islam in an expanding empire (Nasr). Uthman followed in 644, although he was criticized for giving relatives political positions and an uprising resulted in his death. The next caliph was Ali in 656, who moved the capital outside of Arabia to Kufa (Nasr). Every leader had an impact on the empire, and each assisted in promoting Islam with an ultimate goal of expanding the empire.

The Ottoman Empire was a strong force in Islam, helping the religion to spread across much territory. It covered land from Algeria to Bosnia, and was the controlling force until World War I (Nasr). The Turkish leader Uthman, also known as Osman I, created the Empire in 1284. The Turks captured Constantinople in 1453 from the Byzantine Empire, and in 1930, the city was renamed Istanbul after the formation of the Republic of Turkey (Badertscher). Istanbul became a prominent city for the Islamic faith during the time-period. The city was in a prime location for trading, allowing many to pass through, which gave Islam an audience.

The empire covered a great deal of territory, which included people of different faiths and backgrounds. This is why early leaders had to be tactful in how they went about governing their land, and whatever importance religion had in a local setting ultimately had to be about the state. The empire kept a separation between “religion as an institution and religion as a system of meanings and relations that connected a community of faith” (Barkey 10). Rulers used Islam as an institution to run the empire, and as a system of beliefs for personal practice. The rulers of the empire were aware that the state’s interests were not always the same as those of the religion, and they established a relationship between religion and politics rather than allowing one to overpower the other. The millet system was a “script for multi-religious rule,” based on borders between religious groups (Barkey 16). This allowed religions to prosper in their own areas, and was a display of the ultimate goal of toleration.

The empire proved too large for its own good, however, and it fell largely due to its size and economic instability. After World War I, the Ottoman Empire was defeated and partitioned into separate nation states, mainly under British and French control. The

sultanate was officially eliminated in 1922, putting an end to the empire (“Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)”). In the following year, Mustafa Kemal stepped in as ruler of the new republic.

Ataturk

When Mustafa Kemal, also referred to as Ataturk or “Father of the Turks,” created the Republic of Turkey in 1923, he focused on reforms that would separate the religious beliefs of Turks from public life. Turkey went from being the most powerful Islamic state in Asia after the Ottoman Empire, to being marginalized in Europe presently, as Europe does not yet fully accept them as an equal. At the same time, however, Turkey is becoming a model in the Middle East because of their successful negotiations with Europe.

Mustafa Kemal was born in 1881 in modern day Greece, coming from a humble family in what could be considered the “European part of the Empire”; a mix of Greeks, Turks, Christians, Muslims, and Jews (Rustow 815). Ataturk had a history in the military, and goals of creating a republic. A prominent general in the Ottoman army, Kemal was also the youngest to hold a high rank, and the only high-ranking general of Turkish nationality to remain in Turkey after the fall of the empire (Rustow). He defeated British attempts to gain control of Istanbul in 1920, giving him diplomatic recognition and allowing his government to gain control of the area (Rustow). Many Middle Eastern states wanted to gain English support, but Ataturk did not see the British as allies. He had the desire to have an independent state, with strong leadership and individual support. This excerpt of Kemal’s 1919 speech in Ankara demonstrates his belief in sovereignty:

Today the nations of the whole world recognize only one sovereignty: national sovereignty. If we now look at the other details of the organization - we begin our work from the village and the neighborhood and from the people of the neighborhood, that is, from the individual...To be able to save himself, every individual must become personally concerned with his destiny...it must be considered a national and patriotic duty that we should make great efforts especially to attain the goal of a structuring from below upward (Rustow 807).

Ataturk wanted to create a completely independent and cohesive state, not at all similar to the Ottoman Empire. While the empire focused on expansion and inclusion of many cultures and religions, Turkey would form a country with borders and a sense of nationality. Ataturk based his new republic on “nationalism, secularism, reformism, statism, populism, and republicanism” (Ansary 302). His government removed religion from the education system and the courts and began using a more modern, secular system. The Turks took their penal code from Italy, the Code of Obligations from the Swiss, and they adopted a German Commercial Code (Jenkins). There was a state-drafted version of Islam in schools; children under fifteen were able to learn the Quran in the summer only, while children under twelve were completely banned from having lessons in the Quran (Kuru).

Ataturk forbade polygamy and gave women equal rights in the area of divorce and marriage, along with the right to vote and own property. Kemal held the belief that “to keep women secluded is to waste one half of Turkey’s most precious resource,” and this was shown in his personal life, as his wife Latife took part in dinnertime debates and

did not wear a veil (Rustow 816). He strongly encouraged the education of women, and saw this as a truly important step to becoming modern. As of 2004, the literacy rate of the total population of Turkey is 87.4%; about 95% of men are able to read while almost 80 percent of women are literate (“Turkey”). Women of present day Turkey are quickly approaching the level of the men, due in large part to the efforts put forth by Ataturk.

Similar to Christian and European states, Sunday became the day of rest, rather than the traditional Islamic Friday, making Turkey the only Muslim state to do this. They also began using the Gregorian calendar rather than the *hijri*, the typical Islamic calendar, and changed script from Arabic to Latin (Landau). Turkish was typically written in Arabic so this was quite a dramatic change. All languages other than Turkish were abandoned to help promote nationalism through single language usage. He had a goal to remove the power from the *ulama*, the Islamic scholars and leaders, and to manage society in a secular fashion (Ansary). Although these changes were difficult to enforce in small towns and rural areas, their presence was evident. The transfer of the capital city from Istanbul, which was principally Islamic, to Ankara, a city without a strong Islamic background was also a dramatic alteration. Ataturk’s government was based in Ankara, giving the city importance to him.

Kemal chose to call his reforms by tactful names, for example, “He spoke of the international, not the Christian, calendar; of the Turkish, not the Swiss, civil code; of the Turkish, not the Latin, alphabet; of civilized, not European, dress” (Rustow 813). This had the effect of creating a sense of unity and nationality rather than the feeling of separation or disorder. Author Dankwart Rustow also had the belief that Kemal cared more for cultural matters than other problems such as the economy. This had value,

though, since reforms in dress, such as the abolition of the fez, made it more difficult to distinguish a person's social class or religion at first glance.

These reforms, though official, did not completely abolish many traditional Muslim laws. Especially in rural areas, laws in terms of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody continued as usual for Muslims (Yilmaz). In the 2002 article "Secular Law and the Emergence of Unofficial Turkish Islamic Law," the author discusses how Islam has remained in the public life of Turkish citizens despite Ataturk's reformatations. In the area of marriage, Ataturk's reforms deemed religious ceremonies as optional, and without official registration, were criminal. *Talaq*, or "religious divorce," was not recognized either. Many traditional Muslims, however, regarded the religious wedding ceremony as binding, and believed that official recognition was unnecessary. People did seem to realize, though, that "marrying religiously only has disadvantages, whilst having married secularly in addition to the religious marriage has substantial benefits" (Yilmaz 123). By performing both rather than one opposed to the other, Muslims were able to maintain their religious traditions and at the same time, please their government. Religious laws can adapt to the secular system rather than being replaced by it, showing that "state law has limits to shape the society" and that "Turkish people by and large have harmonized the elements of democracy and Islam and have also shown that these two are not necessarily mutually exclusive" (Yilmaz 131). Marriage, along with other aspects of Muslim life, is an example of the way in which religious practices and secular law are able to function together.

Conflicting Identities

The Republic of Turkey has two strong identities that do conflict with one another. The Islamic identity is meaningful in the lives of the Muslim population, while at the same time there is a European identity that the Turkish government has been striving toward since the founding of the Republic. Geographically, a small portion of Turkey, near Istanbul, is in close proximity to Europe, while the majority of the country is part of Asia, or the Middle East. This creates conflict within Turkey, since the country

has the ability to relate to either one side or the other. The discrepancy lies in the idea that while individuals may feel a connection to their roots, in particular the Islamic roots, the government, or those in charge, will encourage the connection with Europe in hopes of modernization.



Source: "Turkey"



Source: “European Union”

Muslim Identity

Traditions and beliefs of Islam give Turkey a strong connection to its Middle Eastern identity and history, considering that the other countries within the Middle East are majority Muslim populations as well. During the rise of Islam, Turkey was at the heart of the Ottoman Empire, and a great influence to other Islamic states. This gives the country a role in Islamic history that cannot be forgotten. Turkey does seem to be developing a strong European identity, however, and the Turkish government strengthens this identity by supporting the efforts to enter into the European Union.

Over the course of Turkey’s history, the government has challenged many traditional Islamic beliefs and practices, causing more tension between Islam and

secularism. An important issue that has been present in Turkey is the ban on the turban, or headscarf, in public Turkish institutions. Religious dress is an important aspect of Islam that is the center of much controversy in Turkey. Many Muslim women consider the headscarf as a symbol of faith, and prohibiting this choice of clothing inhibits the personal freedoms of the women of Turkey. In numerous Muslim countries, such as Afghanistan, women are required to cover their heads, while a 2004 survey in Turkey found that about 61% of women chose to cover their heads despite the ban (Kuru). Another study found that between 1999 and 2006, the percentage of women wearing a head covering decreased from almost 70% to about 60%, although 64% of people surveyed were under the impression that the wearing of a headscarf had increased during this period. Author Murat Somer argues, “People notice headscarf-wearing women more because of their fear of Islamisation” (Somer 1278). The turban does have an Islamic connotation, and people do notice its presence.

As of February 9, 2008, the Turkish government lifted the headscarf ban. Restrictions do remain for “more rigidly Islamic attire - veils that cover all of the hair and neck of the face, or cloaks that cover the body – in public offices”, as the government only allows scarves tied under the chin, being traditionally Turkish and not Islamic (Ayman). The Constitutional Court responded to this debate, stating that the ease on scarves at University “violated the constitution’s secular principles” and the Justice and Development Party (AKP), “which was re-elected last year with a convincing 47% of the vote, says it is a matter of personal and religious freedom” (“Court Annuls Turkish Scarf Reform” 1).

The various reforms in worship are also contentious issues, putting Islam in opposition with the secular government. Arabic is an extremely important language to the Islamic faith, because many believe that it was in Arabic that God conveyed his message, which was compiled into the Quran. Many essentialist teachings of Islam take the stand that the Quran should not be translated from Arabic because it is the word of God (Nasr). For much time, though, worship in Turkey has been moving away from the traditional ways and into a more modern state. In 1928, the Darulfunun School of Theology attempted to reform worship by suggesting that the Quran be recited in Turkish rather than Arabic. This does allow citizens to understand, giving opportunities to those who do not have the means to learn Arabic to participate in religious activities. The school also wanted to allow shoes in mosques when typically there are no shoes permitted (Aydar). Many people did protest these attempts at reform, while others simply did not adhere to them. These issues do challenge some traditions in the faith, leaving stress on the government to determine its limits.

In February of 2008, the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey decided to revise and reinterpret the Hadith, the collection of proverbs from the Prophet Muhammad. Many Turkish officials believe the Hadith influences society negatively, as it is a hindrance to modernization. In fact, some believe many sayings were not even those of the Prophet himself. Professor Mehmet Gormez of the Department of Religious Affairs gives the example of one rule that states that women should not travel alone without a husband's permission. The saying was accepted because "in the Prophet's time it simply wasn't safe for a woman to travel alone like that. But as time has passed, people have made permanent what was only supposed to be a temporary ban for safety reasons"

(Pigott 1). Professor Gormez believes this saying was only intended to be followed temporarily since in another passage of the Hadith, the Prophet declared his desire for “the day when a woman might travel long distances alone” (Pigott 1). It is arguable that passages such as this should indeed be updated since they are no longer relevant, and may even improve upon the treatment of women in many areas. Conversely, the Turkish expert Fadi Hakura argues that the revisions of the Hadith are only to “serve the needs of people in a modern secular democracy,” and that Turkey is “trying to fashion a new Islam” (Pigott 1). Hakura understands that reinterpreting religious texts is not a radical concept, but “the way Turkey is carrying it out in a systematic fashion is quite revolutionary” (Saidazimova 1). Religious texts have been reinterpreted and clarified in the past, but some argue that Turkey’s Department of Religious Affairs is taking it too far.

Supposedly, these changes in the Hadith are not so much a revision as a classification to clarify the text for a better understanding. Bunyamin Erul, one of the project members, explains that the team is attempting to “explain these sayings based on the rules of knowledge of the Hadith in a new style and with some new methodology” (Saidazimova 1). The adjustments seem to be historically accurate and professional, and there have been many other interpretations of the Hadith in the past. One Muslim cleric, Obidkhon Qori Nazarov, states “The Koran and hadiths have been commented on and interpreted since they were revealed. Commenting and interpreting them in a given historical context can happen anytime and is nothing unusual” (Saidazimova 1). The main goal of the project appears to have completely genuine intentions of allowing the Hadith to be more relevant in today’s society. If certain Muslims do not agree with the

changes made, they would be likely to choose a translation or version of the Hadith that is more fitting to their individual preferences.

European Identity

Through the reformations of Ataturk's government, Turkey has established a European identity through shared interests and similar customs with the countries of Europe. The government of Turkey has a mindset geared toward the European system, as there are continued attempts to enter into the European Union (EU). Being in the EU has many advantages, including free travel and trade, a single currency, higher living standards, and job and school opportunities ("Europa: Gateway to the European Union"). These benefits offered by the EU are quite attractive for Turkey, along with the general support and sense of community being a member of the EU would bring.

Being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also gives Turkey something in common with many other members of the EU, as there are only two nations in the EU that are not in NATO (Austria and Ireland). This could possibly assist Turkey in its endeavors toward EU membership. Many United States and British newspapers already consider Turkey as part of Europe. For example, the online versions of the New York Times and BBC list Turkey under the Europe section, rather than the Middle East section (*BBC, New York Times*). According to the CIA World Factbook, however, Turkey is listed as a Middle Eastern country. These observations are interesting because it demonstrates that Turkey is indeed making progress toward assimilating itself within Europe, and this helps to strengthen its European identity. It also verifies, however, that Turkey does indeed have a conflict of identities.

The EU does have many concerns for the admission of Turkey into the union. Many of the reforms made throughout Turkey's history in hopes of modernizing are the traits that the EU may not accept. For example, the EU is concerned with a particular article in the Turkish penal code, which limits "freedom of expression by criminalizing remarks that are perceived to insult 'Turkishness', Turkey or its institutions" ("Monthly Review" 1). There is also the question of what the possibility of a majority Muslim community entering the union means for the EU and even the US, because this in turn affects Turkey's opportunities. Romano Prodi, in his lecture at Salve Regina University, mentioned the unique situation of Turkey. He pointed out that the Turkish parliament would be a very large addition to the union, giving it a great presence and an important role for a new member of the union. Prodi described the EU as a "union of minorities," and that the states surrounding the union are considered a "ring of friends," sharing everything but institutions. Since negotiations with the EU began, however, Turkey no longer sees itself as just a friend.

The EU should also concern itself with the economy of Turkey, as the GDP of Turkey is lower than most countries in the EU. While a 2008 estimate found Turkey's GDP at about US\$900 billion, European countries such as Spain and Italy are over US\$1 trillion, and France and the United Kingdom are over US\$2 trillion ("Turkey"). In order for the Turkish economy to be successful and compatible within the European Union, it would be reasonable for the country to be at the same economic level as other European countries.

In order to obtain EU membership, Turkey is required to fulfill the requirements of the Copenhagen European Council, which include "ensuring the stability of

institutions, guaranteeing complete freedom of expression, human rights, respect and protection for minorities and an efficient market economy” (Cizre 223). One example in particular was the consideration of permitting Kurdish broadcasting and education. Some argue, however, that these freedoms should only be permitted if they do not “inflare Kurdish claims and revive political Islam” (Cizre 224). If this fear persists, it would be difficult for Turks to demonstrate their acceptance of the Kurds.

Issues such as these are important for Turkish political figures, especially those in the Justice and Development Party. In 2003, Abdullah Gul, at the time Prime Minister, strongly emphasized democratic reforms. His party views the potential EU acceptance as a way to ensure political and economic growth and stability as well as an increase in religious freedom (Cizre). Despite their commitment to democracy, the AKP has shown some tendencies to be critical of EU agendas that seemed to protect secularist interests over Islamic interests, concerning the secularists. For example, when the European Court of Human Rights turned down an application against the headscarf ban, and when the EU pressured the AKP to remove their proposal to criminalize adultery (Somer). The EU candidacy, however, has given Turkey guidelines to assist in further reformation, and an opportunity to refocus their interests.

Government's Position

These conflicting identities within Turkey put the government in a difficult position, and the current President of Turkey, Abdullah Gul, has a strong Islamist background, which is quite a change in Turkey. The President claims, however, that he is working toward EU membership and other democratic reforms. Interestingly, President

Gul's wife Hayrunnisa wears a headscarf, which remains a public issue though the ban no longer exists ("Profile: Abdullah Gul"). Many secularists perceive the turban as being in "opposition to Ataturk's secular reforms" and "the country's first lady wearing it would symbolize a major shift of power in society" (Somer 1275). Her headscarf has also been a personal issue for Hayrunnisa Gul. In 1988, Ankara University refused her admission for wearing her headscarf, and she is not invited to official receptions at Cankaya Presidential Palace because of her turban. Hayrunnisa faced this issue stating; "I believe that it will be tackled as Turkey becomes more mature" ("Hayrunnisa Gul" 1).

Before his election to presidency, when Abdullah Gul served as the foreign minister of Turkey in 2007, he published an article on the importance of Turkey as an ally to the United States. He explains that Turkey is vital in creating long-term stability within regions such as Europe or the Middle East, and that it shares the values of peace and democracy with the United States. Gul discusses the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine that the US and Turkey both seek, as well as the desire for peace and stability in Iraq. He firmly believes that Turkey and the US hold the same ideals, he states

I sincerely believe that although the Turkish–American partnership is essential in promoting global peace and security, the more important aspect is the great promise it holds. More specifically, the founding ideals of America and the example wrought by the Republic of Turkey in confronting modernity in a traditionalist society run parallel to, not against, each other (Gul 180).

It is clear that Gul's policies have a similar basis to those of the United States. However, Gul has received, and continues to receive, much criticism for his traditionalist Islamic past.

Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan also has a past in political Islam. Many consider his ideas to be controversial, and perhaps too "Islamic" for a secular government. For example, in 2004 he pushed to make adultery a crime, which the European Union did not agree with. In 2005, when The European Court of Human Rights "decided against permitting head scarves in Turkish universities, he declared that 'only ulama could' make this decision" (Solmazturk 67). Since Prime Minister Erdogan at times disagrees with Europe's wishes, and wants to rely on the *ulama*, "Islamic scholars," for decisions, many secularists question his objectives. In fact, in March of 2008, secular establishments in Turkey sought to shut down Erdogan's political party, the Justice and Development Party, or the AKP, for "antiseccular activities" and restrict both the Prime Minister and President Gul from politics for at least five years (Tavernise "Suit Seeks to Bar Party of Premier"). Although this has yet to occur, it displays the great tensions between secularism and Islam in Turkish government.

Islam, Democracy, and Secularism

In April of 2009, President of the United States, Barak Obama, visited Turkey in order to demonstrate that the United States is able to have positive relations with a majority Muslim country. A New York Times article states, “Turkey is crucial to American interests on many fronts. It borders Iraq and Iran; it has deep influence in Afghanistan; and it is helping efforts to forge a peace deal between Israel and Syria” and that “Mr. Obama also seemed to be pushing for more acceptance of the separation of religion and the state” (Cooper 1). Some see Turkey as the model for other Islamic countries to follow if they are to become modern, democratic, and secular.

The idea of a secular democracy is vague, though, because in a democracy, religious citizens are likely to vote with influence from their belief system. The definition of democracy, as given by the Cambridge Dictionary, is “the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves” (“Democracy” 1). The definition of secularism is “the belief that religion should not be involved with the ordinary social and political activities of a country” (“Secularism” 1). If a country is a secular democracy, however, the people who are electing their representatives are quite likely to be influenced by their religious beliefs, meaning that religion is inevitably involved in the country’s politics. This idea suggests that individuals affect the politics of a state. Islam and democracy are able to co-exist through the unity of people’s beliefs and what is best for the state, since it is the people

themselves determine the fate of their country. According to this notion, Islam and secularism are incompatible, because religion can never be fully removed from the social and political life of a country. It is possible, however, that one may interpret the meaning of secularism differently. In Turkey, for example, secularism may indicate that Islam should no longer be the deciding factor in the country's politics; however, it will always be present and significant in the lives of its citizens. Each political party may have a different concept of secularism as well. While secularists may emphasize the "separation of religion and state," Islamists may emphasize the idea of "freedom of religion" (Somers 1280). While both parties are likely to believe they support secularism, they may not agree on its definition.

Turkey is likely to thrive with support from other strong nations, as long as the needs and desires of the population are considered. One author in particular points out the debate that secularization may be placing "limits on freedom of religion in the name of protecting the public order." He believes, however, that the majority of Turks consider "religion, democracy, and secularism compatible with each other" (Bardakoglu 122). These concepts should be compatible as long as they are equally and affectively considered. It is argued that "Islam's inherent concepts and values provide a strong base for democratic governance" and "Muslim societies look to legitimize their transformations into democratic modes of governance, while maintaining openness toward the religious values" (Ozler 1). If the Turkish government preserves the integrity of its people, Islam should pose no threat to a democratic nation. Another source points out that the "Turkish experience shows that compatibility between Islam and democracy can only be achieved through the politics of moderation" (Ghanim 77). In other words, as

long as secularism and democracy do not impede on religion in the personal life, they can be harmonious. A democracy can have some sort of control to ensure that an individual's personal religious rights are not threatened.

Author Ahmet Kuru believes that secularism does not need to be imposed upon citizens; rather people should accept it as the national governance, not an alternative to religion. The Turkish constitutional court has claimed that Islam has public aims, but that secularism is not so much the separation of religion and state but the separation of religion and worldly affairs (Kuru). Through this definition, religion and secularism have no divergences. Religion can retain its role in an individual's personal life while remaining outside of the public realm, for the most part. Some argue, however, that a distinction between religion and state cannot exist in Islam, while others believe that the two have been separated since the eighth century (Kuru). This difference in opinion supports the idea that religion is dependent upon personal opinion and beliefs, and that many people can interpret it differently.

While religion can vary from person to person within the state, the government of Turkey must be suitable for all its citizens, Muslim or not. Living within the borders of Turkey gives citizens a Turkish identity and sense of nationality, but they are not necessarily all Muslim. Although 99.8% of the population is Muslim, the religion has varying levels of importance for everyone. Within Islam, Sunnis and Shiites share different values and traditions, but living in Turkey, they share a sense of nationality. The Kurds, however, do present an issue with nationalism, as the common belief is that they do not feel Turkish, rather the Kurds want to maintain their own Kurdish nationality.

Islam and democracy should not be in competition with each other, rather the two should be able to co-exist. Many pro-democracy Muslims believe “the modern ideals of equality, freedom, and democracy are not uniquely Western values, but modern necessities compatible with, and even required by, Muslim ideals” (Hefner 498). The concept of democracy itself has no conflict with Islam; rather it is the idea of secularism in the sense that religion is completely removed from public life, as a country should embrace the religion of its citizens. For democratic Islam to be a success, however, there must be a “delicate balance between structural changes in state and society, on one hand, and public culture and ethics, on the other” (Hefner 500). According to this, every part of society must put forth efforts in order to be successful, and one area cannot overtake another.

Islam can and should be able to support democracy, and vice versa. Many religious groups use democracy in order to expand their institutions and gain support in politics. Islamists are gaining more power through the spread of knowledge, and using this education to “challenge the negative labels of the secularists. They are able to promote Islam as a positive force and enhance its value as ‘ideological capital’” (Sutton 77). Islam is able to continue to gain power through knowledge.

Becoming a secular state with an Islamic population is possible because religion and the state are similar in their processes. For example, Iran has radical traits but also maintains many Western concepts, such as “constitutionalism, parliamentarianism, technology, and industry” (Hafez 5). On the other hand, Iran does seem to be an example of Islam’s incompatibility with democracy because of its connection with disorder and extremism, leaving Islam with the label of a “dangerous and regressive force” (Price

124). In Iran, Islam spreading through knowledge came into play during the revolution from 1977 to 1979. More education about Islam caused social movement and a need for political participation (Price). Islam in Iran is unique, though, since the *ulama* remain separate from the government, receiving private funding (Price). However, every state has a unique relationship between religion and government, and Islam has shown its ability to exist with democracy in Turkey.

Resurgent Islam and the Kurds

In 2002, The Justice and Development Party in Turkey won the majority in elections, despite being new as well as somewhat “Islamist.” Erdogan, currently Prime Minister, served as the leader of the AKP during the 2002 campaign. However, he could not be elected into parliament as the Constitutional Court banned him due to accusations of Islamist objectives. He wanted the party to “serve as a bridge between traditional and modernizing Turkey” with a goal of appealing to the average, modern citizen, with a clear agenda of admission into the EU (Mecham 351). According to the AKP, “true secularism meant no state interference in religious practice” (Mecham 351). They wanted to maintain religious institutions within a secular society, seemingly a benefit for both Muslims and secularists. Other religious political parties, such as the Felicity party, used tactics that displayed opposition to the government and Western practices, leaving them with a less diverse following. Many leaders of the Felicity party were also linked to former conservative Islamist parties, giving them an unfavorable association.

The AKP used moderation and smart tactics to lead them to success. They did not openly challenge the military, a number of women were active in the party, and

democracy was their main motivation. “AKP leaders recognized that, if they could strike the fine balance between behaving like a religious protest party and brandishing secular credentials, their potential constituency greatly expanded” (Mecham 354). The party was successful in reaching many different audiences by using religion to support secularism rather than choosing between the two.

Current President of Turkey Abdullah Gul faced opposition by the secularists in 2007 when he was nominated for the presidency. It would be the first time since the founding of the republic that the secularists did not maintain control. In the first round of voting, Gul would need to win 367 votes in the 550-member Parliament, of which 341 members were of his own party (Tavernise, “Turkish Presidential Pick” 1). Gul’s imminent win was indeed unsettling for secularists, but his party was fully involved in modernization, in particular sustaining talks with the EU.

Although it may not have been completely warranted, the past political life of Mr. Gul did concern the secularist parties. In 1991, Gul ran for Parliament as a member of the Welfare Party, which was openly Islamist. A professor at Bilkent University, Metin Heper, suggests that Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan “want to build a strong economy and healthy society, and that Islam is a moral compass to achieve it”, and that the two “thought religion would be a source for the internalization of such values and attitudes” (Tavernise, “Religious Candidate Is Ascendant” 1). It could be argued that the reasoning behind Gul’s policies does not matter as much as what he truly achieves. Although Islam has been important in Gul’s personal existence as well as his political career, this does not suggest that his party is undermining the secularist history of the country. Rather, the

AKP supports secularism in the sense that while Islam is a presence in society, it is not the determining factor in politics.

Gul's platform for presidency emphasized secularism and the desire for EU membership. In August of 2007, Abdullah Gul won the presidency in Turkey, and in his acceptance speech in Parliament he stated; "secularism, one of the basic principles of our republic, is a rule of social peace" (Tavernise, "Turk With Islamic Ties" 1). He supports the foundations of the country, while he also appears to maintain his personal faith. It appears that Gul's view of secularism is strictly political, meaning that Islam should not determine the government. Although Gul's political past was principally Islamic, his outlook for the future and his actions are the truly important factors.

Currently, the power of the AKP has come into question, specifically how the party's foreign policy affects the country. The concern over the party's Islamic ties continues to be an issue, as well as whether it can coincide with the secular fundamentals. The military seems to be at odds with the AKP at times, as it holds strong secularist beliefs. In addition, the AKP has worked with the military in its policies towards the Kurdish people. The AKP has engaged the Kurdistan Regional Government to open dialogue with the Iraqi Kurds, while also combating the PKK, a rebel group of Turkish Kurds (Abramowitz). Erdogan has plans to create new policies toward the Kurds living within Turkey, though any political moves made are likely to be thoroughly scrutinized and analyzed.

In November of 2009, the Turkish government announced plans for granting Kurdish rights. Comprising about 18% of the population of Turkey, Kurds are a strong presence, yet have few rights within the country. In 2008, Parliament did legalize private

language courses in Kurdish, as well as the first Kurdish public television (“Turkey and the Kurds”). Currently, Parliament is considering the use of Kurdish in media and political campaigns, the restoration of the original Kurdish names of thousands of towns, and the establishment of anti-discrimination committees (“Turkey and the Kurds”). Such reforms would greatly benefit the Turkish government, would promote a positive image for the AKP, and may even improve the country’s status with the EU.

Conclusion

As shown through the example of Turkey, secularization can bring about great political and economic success. Under the government of the AKP, there was political stability due to a single party government, an average annual growth of 7.3 percent between 2002 and 2006, and some forms of teaching and broadcasting in Kurdish. “All these reforms moved Turkey closer to Western standards and increased the world’s confidence in Turkey’s democracy and economy” (Sommer 1279).

Turkey has been successful in approaching the concept of modernity as seen by “westerners,” while some argue that at the same time, this causes a movement further from the fundamental Islamic idea of modern, which is essentially the Divine Law. As one source points out,

What is it that orders or forces the times to change as they do?

Islam believes that the factor to make the times and coordinate human society must be the *Shari’ah* (Divine Law). Human beings must seek to live according to the Will of God as embodied in the *Shari’ah* and not change the Law of God according to the changing patterns of a society based on the impermanence of human nature (Nasr 80).

According to this opinion, the Divine Law determines the modern world, and should not be altered based on current standards, which are not eternal. On the other

hand, Edward Said, author of *Covering Islam*, views this as a generalization. He believes that a perception such as this assumes that all Muslims accept and understand the concept of Divine Law; when in reality, Islam does not define the Islamic world. Said argues that Islam can, in fact, separate mosque and state, and to say that it cannot ignores history and makes the leap from Islam as abstract to a complex reality. Islam is far more elaborate and obscure than one can explain in simple terms, and it cannot have a general definition. Islam can exist in Turkey because it is not restricted by secularism and democracy.

The government in Turkey has a large role in how Turks perceive Islam. In a 2007 article, Murat Somer argues that the AKP is a moderate Islamic party, and would be most successful if they are “checked and balanced by strong secularist political parties” (1274). He believes this would allow Islamic conservatives to have equal opportunity to come to power through democratic processes rather than through Islamic radicalism. The AKP has the ability to become an example of Islam existing with “secular, multiparty democracy” (Somer 1276). The party does not oppose religion, although it does regulate it. However, the AKP is not fully committed to either secularism or Islamism, which may cause conservative Islamic followers to be reluctant to continue their support. The performance of this political party will have a great influence on the future of Turkey, as it displays a moderate Islam balanced by secularist opposition.

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