



The Stealth Jihad in Turkey

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Anyone opposed to the global jihad should be watching recent developments in Turkey very closely -- not just for what they reveal about the direction in which that country is headed, but so as to understand nothing less than the new direction of the jihad movement.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, along with President Abdullah Gul and their ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), have been moving for quite some time to dismantle Turkish secularism and transform Turkey into a state governed by Islamic law. But as Prime Minister, Erdogan has not engaged in a direct assault on Turkish secularism. Instead, he and the AKP have steadily chipped away at it, reintroducing provisions of Islamic law piece by piece, while pro-

fessing to uphold the country's secular character.

In 2004 [Erdogan took steps](#) to criminalize adultery, and late in 2005 the AKP [banned alcoholic beverages](#) in government cafes and restaurants in Ankara. In May 2008 [a new law](#) came into effect that effectively outlawed sale of alcohol by the glass in bars and restaurants.

In the 1990s, as mayor of Istanbul, Erdogan was forthright about this goal, [expressing his opposition to secularism](#) in no uncertain terms: "You cannot be both secular and a Muslim! You will either be a Muslim, or secular!...It is not possible for a person who says 'I am a Muslim' to go on and say 'I am secular too.' And why is that? Because Allah, the creator of the Muslim, has absolute power and rule!"

Saying that Allah has “absolute power and rule” is a fundamentally political statement. And from its inception Islam has been a political and social system, not just a religious faith in the way most Westerners conceive of religion. The establishment of Islamic law as the only legitimate system of government is a goal that Erdogan shares with Osama bin Laden and other jihadists around the world; they only differ regarding the best means to go about this.

While Al-Qaeda and other jihad groups have focused on violent attacks on Western targets, Erdogan has shown himself a master of the stealth jihad: the slow, steady, step-by-step encroachment upon secular societal norms, continuing until Islamic law is fully in place.

This effort is proceeding, too, in the West. As a Muslim Brotherhood operative, Mohamed Akram, put it in 1991 memorandum outlining the organization’s strategy in the United States: “The Muslim Brotherhood must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and ‘sabotaging’ its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and Allah’s religion is made victorious over all other religions.” Akram explained that this sabotaging of Western civilization would take place not through terror attacks, but by numerous non-violent initiatives carried out by a variety of Islamic organizations. With the public geared to be on guard only against ter-

ror attacks, these efforts would slip by unnoticed.

And so they have in Turkey -- at least up until last week. In line with its small-step, indirect approach, for years now the government has been trying to overturn the law banning the Islamic headscarf in Turkish universities. But [on Thursday](#) the Turkish Constitutional Court, the nation’s highest court, overturned a new AKP-backed law allowing the headscarf in universities, saying it contravened the Constitutional tenets providing for Turkish secularism. With the possibility looming that the Constitutional Court could even ban the AKP itself, on the grounds that it posed a threat to Turkey’s Constitutional order, Erdogan canceled a trip to Switzerland and returned to Ankara, where he and his top aides met in an emergency strategy meeting on Friday. If the party is outlawed, Erdogan and Gul could be barred from holding political office.

The Turkish courts and military have intervened to save Turkish secularism before. They may now, and soon again. If Erdogan were to be down, he would not be out, and analysts would be well-advised to study his stealth jihad in Turkey: there are groups in Western Europe and the U.S. that are pursuing exactly the same kind of small-scale, step-by-step approach that the AKP has followed with so much success until last week.

With story after story appearing documenting the disarray and decay of Al-Qaeda, the stealth jihad could be the wave of the future

around the world. And its guiding light, however his personal political

fortunes may shift, will be Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

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