One of the major problems of Turkey’s democratic consolidation has been the heavy impact of the armed forces on civilian politics. Since the country’s transition to a multiparty system in the mid-1940s, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have complicated democratic processes by their outright interventions in 1960, 1971, and 1980; by forcing the government to resign in 1997; and by restricting the authority of civilian governments. Moreover, there have been a number of coup plans and attempts that were aborted thanks to the vigilance of the higher echelons of the military hierarchy.

Civil-military relations became an international issue with Turkey’s candidacy to the European Union (EU). Despite ups and downs, Turkey has so far made considerable progress in building new and democratic civil-military relations. From 2002 to 2006, in order to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria for accession to the EU, the parliament revised the Constitution several times and adopted new legislation curbing the prerogatives of the military in political matters.

These reforms increased the power of the parliament and the Court of Audit to oversee and control all military resources and spending, including state property in possession of the TAF. The auditing process, however, still requires enabling legislation. The civilian membership of the National Security Council was increased, its secretariat was civilianized, and its power was reduced to the level of a purely advisory body. The State Security Courts were abolished. The jurisdiction of the military courts to try civilians in time of peace was abrogated and military personnel were henceforth to be tried by civilian courts. Moreover, military representatives were withdrawn from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). The major EU organs recognized that Turkey had sufficiently (although not fully) fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria to start accession talks. The subsequent “Progress Reports,” after acknowledging Turkey’s progress, emphasized the need for greater accountability and transparency in the conduct of security affairs in line with the European practice (n.a., 2006: 7–8).

Although these reforms brought Turkey’s civil-military relations more into line with democratic norms and practices, it is too soon to say that the military has completely withdrawn from politics. No change was made to the TAF Internal Service Law, which authorizes the military to intervene ex officio if it deems this necessary for the protection of the regime. The TAF has yet to internalize democratic norms and values in their relationship with elected politicians.
Turkey still is in the middle of an ongoing process of democratic consolidation. There is not yet an established constitutional, democratic civil-military regime in the country. This chapter, therefore, will only trace the course of a trend—the outcome of which is yet to be determined—toward further democracy, with its paradoxes and dilemmas. The next section will examine the historical and cultural origins of a peculiar tradition of military guardianship and civil-military collaboration; the following section will survey the conduct of civil-military relations under the Republic, including the period of military interventions and failed coup attempts, and temporary cooperative regimes based on precarious civilian democratic control. The final section is devoted to the period of transformation in the first decade of the twenty-first century, which reveals a deeper sociopolitical movement toward a democratic regime of civil-military relations.

The historical and cultural origins of the military guardianship

The Ottoman modernization generated two ostensibly contradictory traditions, which were inherited by the Republic: the military guardianship and the interpenetration of “traditional” forces and modernity. The origins of the guardianship ethos can be traced back to the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Ottomans recognized European military superiority and the urgent necessity of reforming their armed forces and public administration. The three generations of the Ottoman elite in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the leaders of the Tanzimat, the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks, shared a consistent policy of “state preservation,” which gradually became a state ideology and continued to affect the thinking of the Republican elites of consecutive generations (Mardin, 2006: 192).

The military and political thought during the years of modernization was first influenced by a unidimensional reading of the philosophy of the Enlightenment. The early intellectual encounters with the West occurred in the eighteenth century and were reflected in the ambassadorial reports of the Ottoman envoys. Another window on the West was opened by a number of European converts who served the Porte as soldiers. They introduced to the Ottoman military establishment European military techniques, education, and organizational reform. These initial innovations led in 1792 to the creation of the “New Order” or Nizam-i Cedid, the modern military units of Sultan Selim III. In 1826 Sultan Mahmud II abolished the traditional elite army, the Janissary corps.

The European innovators were products of the French Enlightenment, who believed that the state and society, including the military, should be reorganized according to rational norms. The Ottoman reformers took their cues from the innovations introduced by the French Enlightenment and the simplistic sociopolitical implications of a crude rationalism that ignored the philosophical debate between the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and that of the Counter-Enlightenment of the nineteenth century. This unidimensional conception of rationalism became a dominant intellectual movement, permeating military education and the civilian administrative and judicial cadres (Karaosmanoğlu, 1993: 21–24).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, this intellectual movement was blended with an equally simplistic materialist and positivist philosophy. The Young Turks’ mindset was shaped predominantly by materialist-positivist ideas. They viewed materialism “as the driving force behind the material progress of the West” (Hanoğlu, 2008: 185). Consequently, they considered religion “as the greatest obstacle to human progress” (Hanoğlu, 2001: 305). Despite their antireligious sentiment, the Young Turks and their Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) from time to time used religion to legitimize modernization by collaborating with the
ulema and other religious circles (Hanoğlu, 2008: 305–6). Another source of inspiration was German militarism. The influence of German military instructors such as Colmar von der Goltz Pasha, who taught in the modern Hamidian military schools where many of the Young Turks and future members of the CUP were educated, was considerable. Their weltanschauung was formed by nationalism, militarism, and social Darwinism (Akmese, 2005: 21–22). The Nation in Arms, von der Goltz's book, was translated into Turkish in 1885 and read as a textbook in the War College (Harbiye) (Akmese, 2005: 69). Another significant characteristic of the Young Turks was their elitism. Their strong elitist tendencies were largely predicated on positivist French sociology as developed by Durkheim, Comte, de Tarde, and, particularly, the vulgarized versions of their ideas published by Gustave Le Bon (Hanoğlu, 2008: 308–9). The Young Turks did not place much faith in the people and democratic representation. Their major concern was the state, and they viewed society from the perspective of the state. In their eyes the parliament, as “an extension of the modern bureaucratic apparatus,” had to be “under the control of an enlightened governing elite” (Hanoğlu, 2008: 311). Thus, the military emerged as the prime transformer and guardian of the modern state.

Recent historical-sociological studies have brought to our attention another significant Ottoman legacy which may arguably contribute to our understanding of civil-military relations in modern Turkey. Serif Mardin refers to “a modern Turkish Islamic exceptionalism”, the roots of which can be traced back to “the ubiquity of a peculiar mix of state and religious discourse in the Ottoman Empire” where “secular as well as religious elites shared a space provided by the state” (Mardin, 2005: 146). In their dialectical relationship, “traditional forces and modernity ... have interpenetrated and been transformed over time due to their propinquity” (Mardin, 2005: 160). Their interpenetration legitimized change and facilitated adaptation to modernity (Karpat, 2001: 420). The interpenetration of traditionalism and modernism has been reflected in the history of civil-military relations, including during the Republican period. Their political culture, which reflected a blend of traditionalism and modernism, encouraged them to come to shared understandings for the achievement of their common objective of reforming the state in order to ensure its survival. For instance, in the War of Independence against the occupying powers (1919–22), the military remained subordinated to the parliament (the Grand National Assembly) and was subject to its oversight. This democratic framework, however, faded after the War of Independence.

Following the demise of the Ottoman Empire as a result of World War I, the Republic, despite its pretensions, did not represent a total break from the intellectual and political ethos of the nineteenth century. Atatürk and his colleagues, who organized and led the resistance against the occupying powers upon the decision of the Grand National Assembly, had been educated in the modernized Hamidian schools and indoctrinated in the intellectual environment of the Young Turks. An outlook that placed supreme importance on the defense of modernity and national unity made its way into their perception of what constituted a threat. Debating laicism and cultural nationalism was viewed as a threat to internal security, particularly after the Kurdish revolt of 1925. Nevertheless, at the same time, the Republic refrained from following the Young Turk tradition in some important respects. First of all, the republicans were realists. They disliked irredentism. They limited nationalism to within the borders of the Republic, namely to Anatolia and eastern Thrace, where the majority of the population was Turkish-speaking. They rejected revisionist doctrines such as pan-Islamism or pan-Turkism, but they were implacable defenders of political independence and territorial integrity. Although, like the Young Turks, they were anti-imperialists, the Western world occupied a privileged place in their minds as a prime source of reference. Their ultimate goal was to lead the nation to “contemporary civilization” and to integrate it within the Western community of nations. For
Atatürk, “contemporary civilization” was a dynamic concept that represented continual progress (Karaosmanoğlu, 2009: 35).

The Republican regime inherited secularism and positivism as necessary means not only to struggle against religious fanaticism, but also, and more significantly, to reorganize the society and the state along the lines of a new national identity. Even today, for many state officials (military and civilian) and politicians, individual liberties are to be construed according to “scientific principles.” They must not cripple the modernizing Republican project, as understood in the 1930s, because that project is “scientific” (Karaosmanoğlu, 2009: 34). It should be noted that there is today heated debate on this Turkish Republican version of secularism (laicism). Sami Selçuk, a former president of the Court of Cassation, has criticized the doctrinaire aspect of Turkish secularism. He argued that it “starts from a concern for rationality … and aims to develop a rational individual. In the realization of this aim, it regards religion as the principal obstacle to modern society and politics” (Selçuk, 2000: 56–57).

The excessive politicization of the Ottoman army by the Young Turks (specifically, the CUP) had greatly damaged military professionalism and brought about the tragedy of the Balkan Wars. The defeat at the hands of the newly independent Balkan states had a lasting impact on Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Under the Republic, Atatürk removed the TAF from any position of “direct responsibility for government” (Hale, 1994: 88). Serving army officers were prohibited from involvement in party politics and from voting in elections. The military, however, was not kept completely out of politics. Atatürk made sure that it remained loyal to him and to the basic tenets of the Republic (Hale, 1994: 76; Mango, 2000: 417, 532). This implied that, under the Republican regime, the guardianship role of the military would effectively continue. In Huntingtonian terms, the TAF would “mirror” the republican and secular state. This was a prototypical example of “subjective control of the military” (Huntington, 1985: 80–83), different from “objective” democratic control within the framework of a separation between a “professional” military and a democratically elected government (Huntington, 1985: 83–85). Nevertheless, it can be argued that Atatürk greatly reduced the officers’ tendency toward involvement in political activities, which had been one of the causes of the Ottoman Empire’s collapse (McLaren, 2008: 218).

The dilemmas of the guardianship

On the transition to a multiparty system after World War II, opinions in the military were divided. Quite a number of officers were anxious about the risks of democratization, because they believed that it would be difficult to maintain the Republican principles, especially laicism, in a democratic polity. Another group of officers, including some generals, were in favor of a multiparty system and believed that the democratic transformation would facilitate Turkey’s admission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The former group of officers went so far as to approach İsmet İnönü, president of the Republic and the leader of the governing Republican People’s Party, to suggest that the newly formed Democrat Party (DP) should not be allowed to take power through the democratic and free elections that were soon to take place. President İnönü, however, strongly rebuffed their suggestion, and the latter group of officers assured the leaders of the DP that they would not allow such an unfair intervention in the elections (İpekçi and Coşar, 2010: 3–18; Hale, 1994: 91–92; McLaren, 2008: 219–20). The voting took place in May 1950, and the Democrat Party came to power with a considerable majority.

After the transition to democracy in the late 1940s, the TAF found itself trapped in a multilayered dilemma. In the post-World War II period, democracy emerged as a fundamental
dimension of modernization. The TAF gave its tacit consent to the adoption of the multiparty system. Democratization, however, brought ideological fault lines and conflicting socio-economic interests to the center stage. Moreover, what seemed more ominous was that it tended to make religion increasingly visible as a social force. The officers, confronted with this challenge, adopted an ambivalent position toward democracy. Although they tended to share the view that democratization had become an integral element of modernization, they believed that political parties must not divide the nation into conflicting groups and must act in conformity with Atatürk’s secular principles. In other words, as an implication of its peculiar understanding of democracy, the military was willing to tolerate interparty conflicts “only if a guard such as itself was tasked with monitoring them” (Aydın, et al., 2006: 80–81).

On the one hand, the military desired to promote democratization because democracy was an integral part of modernization, and modernity implied civilian primacy. On the other hand, however, they refrained from acting as an agent of the civilian government because they believed that subordination to the civilians would prejudice their role of guardianship. The officers believed that they should stay out of politics because politics would undermine their professional integrity, but still intervened in politics whenever they deemed it necessary for the protection of secularism and other Republican principles. The military’s unpredictable conduct complicated the civilian politicians’ efforts to manage civil–military relations. This was reflected in, for instance, Ismet İnönü’s treatment of the military. On many occasions, İnönü praised the TAF for their “faith in democratic values.” At times when the generals tended to interfere with public affairs, however, he would warn the military to stay out of politics (Heper, 1998: 228–29).

The dilemma confronting the military was the reflection of a more fundamental dilemma and a deep uncertainty faced by the entire modernizing elite. As İlkkay Sunar has pointed out, “the dilemma involved finding a modus vivendi between the conflicting imperatives of republican secularist consolidation and democracy, and the possibility of failure of such an accommodation” (Sunar, 2004: 102–3).

That problematique had a profound impact not only on the mindset of Turkish officers, but also on the military organization as a whole. It heavily politicized the TAF. It had a divisive effect on the military establishment and seriously damaged the military’s professionalism and its hierarchy. While the lower-ranking officers were often divided by bitter conflicts, the higher echelons struggled to maintain the unity and hierarchy of the army, especially after the military intervention of 1960.

This intervention, which severely violated military discipline and flouted the chain of command, opened the way for subsequent coup plans and on occasion actualized interventions. The military, however, had never intended to stay in power; they quickly handed power back to an elected civilian government after having prepared a favorable constitutional and political milieu for the continuation of their guardianship. Following the coup of 1960, the military regime executed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and two of his cabinet ministers, Fatih Rüştü Zorlu and Hasan Polatkan, upon the decision of a special tribunal. Nevertheless, the junta left the government to elected civilian politicians, after having drafted a constitution that was even less democratic than the constitution of 1924, particularly as regarded civil–military relations. The new constitution extended the privileges of the military and curtailed the powers of the executive and legislative branches.

In spite of occasional ruptures, there have also been periods of “concordance” (Schiff, 1995: 7–34; Narlı, 2000: 107–27) and “collegial” (Bland, 2001: 525–40) relationships between the military and the civilian government in the history of the Turkish Republic since 1960. During those interludes, civil–military relations operated within a fairly effective democratic framework. The Özal period (1983–93), and the periods of the EU reforms, from 1999 to 2002 under a
coalition government and from 2002 to 2006 under the government of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), can be mentioned as conspicuous examples.

An important development in that direction took place in the 1980s following the military coup of 12 September 1980. In 1983 the Motherland Party came to power. Its leader, Turgut Özal, had strong Islamic roots. The party, however, pursued a policy of integrating with the world economy and altered the state-controlled protectionist economic structure of the country itself. Özal, who served as prime minister from 1983 to 1989 and as president between 1989 and 1993, was a firm believer in economic liberalism. He promoted entrepreneurial interests and competition in international markets. The liberalization of the economy had a positive impact on the defense industry. It also furthered cooperation between the public and private sectors. The intensification of business relations between the TAF and the private sector (both domestic and international) moderated the military's state-centric conception of internal and international politics. The new policy opened the defense industry to foreign investment and technology. Moreover, the government established the Defense Industry Development and Support Administration/Undersecretariat of Defense Industries (DIDA), the aim of which was to promote cooperation between different sectors and to encourage transfer of technology and capital to Turkey. The DIDA also administered the Defense Industry Support Fund, which generated income through indirect taxes levied on luxury imports. The fund financed the defense industry, including various joint projects. The most important such venture was the F-16 project undertaken by the newly established Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) (Karaoğlan and Kibaroğlu, 2002: 157-59).

Turgut Özal's active interest in security and defense matters and the steps taken by him to rapidly develop the defense industry created a fairly large space of common understanding and concerted action between the democratically elected civilian government and the military. This "conciliatory relationship" with the TAF consolidated political authority and facilitated a smooth as well as rapid civilianization of the political system following the 1980 coup (Küloğlu and Şahin, 2006: 96-97). Özal was remarkably successful in playing a determining role in security and defense policy, to the extent of imposing his political will on the TAF in the matter of the appointment of his own candidate, General Necip Torumtay, as the chief of General Staff in 1986. In a recent interview, General İlíker Başbuğ, chief of General Staff at the time (of the interview), acknowledged "with gratitude" Özal's contributions to the modernization of the TAF (Başbuğ, 2010).

Turgut Özal believed in the primacy of the civilian authority over the military and did his best to strictly apply that principle during his presidency. In the heat of the Gulf crisis in December 1990, Torumtay resigned as chief of General Staff as the result of a divergence of views between himself and Özal over what Turkish policy should be in the 1990–91 Gulf War. Torumtay, in a statement to the media, explained his resignation in the following words:

There is no conflict between the military and civilian officials. The Turkish Armed Forces commanders know very well that the civilian authority has always the final word. The army knows where it stands ... Of course, in meetings with civilian officials differences of opinion will arise. But this is only to be expected.

(n.a., 1990: 2; Torumtay 1994: 125-26)

Resolving the dilemmas

After the death of President Özal in 1993, the military resumed its guardianship role and forced a democratically elected government to resign in 1997. Subsequently, another notable period of
civil-military reconciliation on a democratic basis occurred under the coalition and the JDP governments, which introduced a series of reforms curtailing powers and privileges of the military. These reforms were realized in tacit agreement with the military. Although the founders of the JDP have strong Islamist origins, they have followed in the footsteps of Özal and have, to a considerable extent, abandoned religious militancy and adopted a position in harmony with the world economic system and the EU.

Moreover, the JDP government has shown a great interest in pursuing an active policy not only in neighboring regions but also in NATO and in multilateral peace operations in countries as distant as Afghanistan. Participation in such operations has greatly contributed to the transformation of the Turkish military in line with emerging conceptualizations that take into account the human and societal dimensions of security (Oğuzlu and Güngör, 2006: 472–88).

In the twenty-first century the military has become more careful not to involve itself in politics in too palpable a manner. The armed forces have seemed to develop a modus vivendi with civilian governments (Heper and Itzkowitz-Shifrinson, 2005: 244). There are several reasons for this trend. First, in the contemporary era, democracy, which implies civilian primacy and the military’s subordination to a democratically elected civilian government, cannot be disintegrated from modernization. As the “agent of modernization,” the military has been increasingly mindful of this historical development since the end of World War II. Second, the military is aware of the fact that its involvement in politics undermines the professionalism of its officer corps. Third, there is growing pressure for further democratization from public opinion. Political statements by the chief of General Staff and the force commanders spark heated debates in the media. Many columnists and academics severely criticize such statements as unjustifiable interference in civilian politics.

The TAF supported Turkey’s bid for EU membership, constitutional and political reforms, and the radical change in Turkish policy concerning Cyprus. In June 2006 then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül acknowledged that the armed forces had made valuable contributions to Turkey’s EU objectives and the related reforms. He said, “The reforms would be much more difficult without the support of the military. They understand where Turkey’s interests lie. They have a long-term strategic vision ... The change in Turkey’s Cyprus policy became possible thanks to their active contributions. We have been in continual contact with them” (Yetkin, 2006: 6).

Although these reforms and the public’s demands for further democratization brought Turkey more into line with democratic norms and practices, occasional public declarations by military leaders in 2006 and 2007 demonstrated the continuing involvement of the armed forces in politics. On 27 April 2007 the military’s effort to influence the outcome of the referendum on the presidential election through an “e-memorandum” was a blatant example of this. That “memorandum” (n.a., 2007c: 7) proved ineffectual, however, with the JDP winning a landslide victory in July 2007.

Nevertheless, even before that date, following Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s confidential meeting with Chief of Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt in the Dolmabahçe Palace on 4 May 2007, the military had begun to gradually adopt a position of standing off from public affairs. The new pattern of civil-military relations was marked by close and effective collaboration between the civilian government and the military concerning the Kurdish problem in general and the fight against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in particular. The air and land forces undertook 15 cross-border operations against PKK targets in northern Iraq in 2007–08. Before the launching of the operations, the government worked hard to prepare a favorable political and diplomatic environment in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. At that
time, the prime minister and the chief of General Staff began meeting almost weekly in both official and unofficial meetings to discuss and evaluate the operations and other security problems. In addition, “summit meetings” of the president of the Republic, the prime minister, and the chief of the General Staff, joined on occasion by other members of the top echelons of the state, took place at times of political crisis. A declaration from one of these summits in early June 2007 emphasized that the fight against terrorism would be carried out “on the basis of democracy and rule of law,” and also stated that “full harmony and coordination” existed between the government and the armed forces (n.a., 2007b: 6). This collegial relationship not only created a window of opportunity for further democratization, but also highlighted the importance of the strategic interaction between politics and military operations. Furthermore, it brought to the forefront the inescapable political dimension of counterterrorism and the Kurdish problem.

Two factors motivated civil-military collaboration in this instance. Before and during the operations, the need to maintain national solidarity became and remained an issue of high priority. The military wanted to avoid any steps that would split the nation. Second, and probably more significantly, a change of approach to the struggle against the PKK had occurred. The internationalization, to some degree, of the PKK issue and the Kurdish problem on the one hand, and the convergence of this with the complex warfare—involving a multiplicity of warring parties, states, and non-state entities—in Iraq on the other aggregated diverse security challenges emanating both from inside and outside Turkey’s borders. This development made the political and other nonmilitary dimensions of the problem increasingly visible. Moreover, the revival of the PKK despite successful military operations in the 1990s confirmed the need to subordinate military operations to a new, comprehensive understanding integrating military and political efforts, including economic, diplomatic, sociopsychological, and public relations measures (Başbug, 2009: 30–32). Such an approach would naturally require close collaboration between the military and the civilian government.

The revelation of numerous plots and coup plans, beginning in 2003, was another significant development in civil-military relations. The General Staff opened military premises, including a location in Ankara where top secret documents were kept, to public prosecutors, judges, and the police, enabling them to proceed with their investigations and detain suspects. The former chief of General Staff, General İşık Koşaner, who resigned from office in protest over the growing number of officers in jail and the long detention periods, informed the public that there were in prison 250 general, admirals, and other officers. Of these, 173 were on active duty and 77 were retired. Another 14 generals and admirals and 58 colonels were under investigation and facing detention (n.a., 2011). The High Criminal Courts deemed most of the indictments sufficient to hear the cases.

**Conclusion**

The Turkish Republic inherited a tradition of military guardianship from the Ottoman Empire. Under the Republic, there have occurred periods of collegial relationship, in which the initiative as well as the last word belonged to the civilian political authority. In other words, the civilian politicians and the military were not always at loggerheads. Yet, on the whole, military guardianship has been a characteristic of the Republic. This is, however, changing in the twenty-first century. Since Turkey is rapidly integrating into a globalizing world, and is already a member of NATO and OSCE, as well as a candidate for EU membership, it is not possible for political and cultural interaction to take place solely at the domestic level. Involvement of external actors is inevitable, enlarging the context in which the dialogic process is occurring. The contemporary
international context, interpenetrating with the internal one, discourages overt military intervention in politics and promotes civilian democratic control of the military.

The repeated flare-ups of the PKK's terrorist activities and the continuation of the Kurdish problem despite successful military operations indicated that military measures had to be reconsidered within the broader framework of a comprehensive strategy integrating military and political (i.e., all nonmilitary) efforts. As noted above, such a strategy would require the military and the democratically elected civilian government to work closely together. Moreover, the internationalization of the Kurdish question focused attention on the legitimacy of internal decision-making procedures and practices. This also motivated the involvement of the political leadership and engaged the military in a collegial relationship with the government.

The political power of the military has been significantly reduced by both internal and international developments, with civil-military relations in Turkey clearly tending in the direction of more civilian political initiative and less military influence over civilian politics. A consensus among the political parties and the military on setting a more democratic balance between secularism and religion, and between solving the Kurdish question and preserving the unitary state will certainly accelerate the process toward greater civilian control of the military. Although a considerable degree of democratization has been achieved in this regard, Turkey still lags behind Western democratic standards.

On 18 August 2008 the government released a national program regarding EU accession, which provided for significant additional reform in Turkey's civil-military relations. The new program increased the power of the Court of Audit to control all military spending. In addition, the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians and over military officials involved in civilian affairs would be restricted, while the jurisdiction of civilian courts would be extended. Furthermore, internal security services such as the gendarmerie were to be put under complete civilian control (n.a., 2008: 1, 17). Although the judiciary and the internal security services were reformed according to the national program of 2008 without delay, the by-law concerning the Court of Audit came into force only in 2011. Nevertheless, the government and the Republican People's Party (the main opposition) have expressed their intention that democratic reforms should continue during the process of preparing a new and more democratic constitution in 2012.

The EU has played a key role in facilitating and expediting the reform process in Turkey by opening effective new channels of intercultural dialogue, as could be observed during the period from 2002 to 2006. Taken together, the EU-related reforms, the debate in the media on civil-military relations, and the trials of high-ranking officers in civilian courts signify—despite the occasional political declarations of the General Staff and its reflexive moves to defend what it regards as its professional honor—not only an institutional and structural change, but also the transformation of Turkey's politico-military culture.

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Rethinking Civil–Military Relations in Turkey: The Problems of the Democratic Governance of the Defense and Security Sectors

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Rethinking Civil–Military Relations in Turkey: The Problems of the Democratic Governance of the Defense and Security Sectors

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ABSTRACT This article aims to explore the problems of democratic governance of the defense and security sectors in Turkey. In recent years, to democratize its civil–military relations, Turkey has successfully dealt with the first-generation problems of making institutional reforms to eliminate the military’s intervention in politics. Democratic civil–military relations, however, cannot be achieved only by getting the military out of politics, but also require the elimination of second-generation problems concerning the democratic governance of the defense and security sectors. In this respect, Turkey faces significant challenges related to its ineffective defense policy-making structures, insufficient parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors and civil society’s very low level of participation in defense and security debates. Turkey needs to make reforms in these problematic areas in order to democratize its civil–military relations.

Introduction

The military, which played a significant role in the establishment of the Turkish republic, has been one of the most important actors protecting and upholding the secular and unitary characteristics of the current regime. It even did not hesitate to stage coups when it considered that these characteristics were in danger, interrupting democratic political life through two direct (May 27, 1960 and September 12, 1980) and two indirect (March 12, 1971 and February 28, 1997) coups. In addition, before permitting a return to democracy after each coup, the military obtained important privileges through constitutional and legal regulations to intervene in the political sphere, which placed the military as one of the most important actors in Turkish politics. The specific privileges that the military obtained were the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Kurulu, MGK), Article 35 of the military’s Internal
Service Law, the State Security Courts (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri, DGMs), the right of the military to select one of the members of the Higher Education Council (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu, YÖK), and the right of the Secretariat General of the MGK to nominate one member of the Supreme Board for Radio and Television (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu, RTÜK). All these privileges have now been revoked, with the reforms of the MGK and the revision of Article 35 being particularly important to end the military’s direct involvement in politics. The military also directly intervened in politics through the informal mechanisms, such as statements, press releases and declarations given by high-ranking officers. However, in 2010, the amendment to the 1982 Constitution allowed officers to be tried in civilian instead of military courts for criminal offenses against state security and the constitutional order, which almost completely ended the military’s usage of the informal mechanisms.

Through various institutional reforms, the Turkish military’s power in politics has been significantly narrowed. The military’s non-intervention over several policies introduced by conservative Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) in recent years provides good examples of the impact of this reform process. For instance, the military could not react to government’s lifting of the ban on headscarves in universities in 2010, the amendment allowing officers to be tried in civilian courts in the same year, and the government’s negotiations with the leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in 2013 with the aim to end this illegal organization’s terrorist attacks in Turkey. However, these reforms are not sufficient to ensure democratization of a country’s civil–military relations. This requires eliminating problems in the democratic governance of the defense and security sectors as well. The problems in this area are defined by Andrew Cottey et al. as second-generation problems of building effective defense policy-making structures, ensuring parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors, and enhancing the contribution of the civil society in defense and security debates. Turkey has significant second-generation problems, and it is not possible for it fully to democratize its civil–military relations without eliminating them.

This article begins by theorizing civil–military relations in Turkey in terms of the “second-generation problematic” defined by Andrew Cottey et al. The second section of the article explains the reforms to democratize civil–military relations in Turkey, which have almost ended the military’s intervention in politics. The third section broadly analyzes the problems of democratic governance of the defense and security sectors in Turkey, the second-generation problems. The conclusion provides brief suggestions regarding how Turkey could eliminate its second-generation problems and find a way to ensure real democratization in civil–military relations.

**Theoretical Framework**

Since the mid-1990s, scholars have explained the Turkish military’s involvement in politics in relation to internal threats, such as Kurdish nationalism and the rise of political Islam. For instance, Ümit Cizre argues that increasing Kurdish nationalism since the beginning of the mid-1990s has legitimized the military’s political role.
Similarly, Gareth Jenkins asserts that the Turkish military has returned to more active political role in the early 1990s due to the increasing threat of Kurdish nationalism. 4 Ergun Özbudun, after deeply analyzing Kurdish nationalism and the rise of political Islam, also argues that the Turkish military will continue to intervene in politics as long as these internal threats exist. 5 One theory explaining civil—military relations in Turkey is Michael Desch’s structural theory in which he argues that, as one of the dimensions of his structural theory, the military’s involvement in politics is the highest level in a country when there is high internal and low external threat. 6 This theory has been applied a number of studies. 7 All of these studies, which paid close attention to the role of internal threats, were valuable indeed. However, it is no longer possible to explain civil—military relations in Turkey through internal threats because, although these threats continue, the military’s intervention in politics has been significantly narrowed through several institutional reforms.

Democratic civil—military relations require ending the military’s intervention in politics. This also requires the democratic governance of the defense and security sectors, an area where Turkey has to make reforms, which should be theorized as “the second-generation problematic.” According to Andrew Cottey et al., the problem of military intervention in politics in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) was removed through institutional reforms in their transition periods. This suggests that the debate on democratic civil—military relations in the CEECs needs to focus on the democratic governance of the defense and security sectors. This shifts, they believe, the focus from the military’s intervention in politics to the wider problem of the democratic management and implementation of defense and security policy. They argue that the problem today in the CEECs is not the first-generation problem of making reforms to ensure political control of the military, but the second-generation problem of establishing effective structures for the democratic governance of defense and security sectors. They observe that second-generation problems in the CEECs include “building effective defense policy-making structures, establishing meaningful parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors and developing wider civil society input into defense and security debates.” 8

Second-generation problems also create a challenge to ensure democratic civil—military relations in Turkey. Turkey’s problems in the area of building effective defense policy-making structures stem from several factors: the General Staff’s direct connection to the Prime Ministry instead of the Ministry of National Defense (MoND), the General Staff’s wide-ranging duties in defense policymaking, the officers’ occupation of key positions in the MoND Under-secretariat, and the appointments of inexperienced civilian staff to the Under-secretariat of Defense Industries of the MoND. Regarding the Turkish parliament’s oversight of the defense and security sectors, its lack of authority in preparing and ratifying the National Security Policy Document (Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi, MGSB) and its merely ex post oversight of the defense budget are all serious problems. Another significant problem in this area is the lack of authority of the parliamentary committee on defense regarding the determination of the defense budget, defense procurement and security policy. One of the important factors ensuring democratic
governance of the defense and security sectors is the development of wider civil society input into defense and security debates. However, it is not possible to say that Turkish civil society sufficiently engages in defense and security debates through civil society organizations, including think tanks, the media, and defense academies in universities.

Reforms to Prevent the Military’s Intervention in Politics

Turkey was declared a European Union (EU) candidate country at the European Council’s Helsinki Summit in December 1999, upon which several democratization reforms were introduced to qualify for full membership. One dimension of these reforms was concerned with the democratization of Turkish civil–military relations, aiming to remove the military’s privileges within the system. In this reform process, the MGK’s function was reduced to that of an advisory body; the DGMs, which had included both military and civilian members, were totally abolished; the provision allowing for the selection of one member of the YÖK by the General Staff was removed from the Law on Higher Education; and the provision allowing for the nomination of one member of the RTÜK by the MGK’s Secretariat General was repealed from the Law on the Establishment of and Broadcasting by Radio and Television Corporations. Among these reforms, it is worth mentioning that the reform of the MGK was a significant step toward ending the military’s ability to directly and formally intervene in politics.

After this EU-inspired process, Turkey has continued to introduce some significant reforms to curtail the direct military intervention in politics. First, the constitutional amendment of 2010 allowed military officers to face trial in civilian courts for criminal offenses against state security, the constitutional order and its functioning made a significant contribution to decreasing the military’s ability to informally yet directly intervene in politics through statements, press releases, and declarations given by high-ranking officers. Second, in 2013, the revision of Article 35 of the military’s Internal Service Law was an important move toward abolishing military leaders’ legitimization of coups. In short, Turkey was very successful in dealing with first-generation problems by significantly narrowing the military’s political influence. The following section explains the reform of the MGK, the introduction of the constitutional amendment in 2010, and the revision of the Article 35 in more detail.

One of the most important articles of the 1961 Constitution was the establishment of the MGK. In fact, both the USA and several EU member countries have similar institutions; however, none of them were designed to ensure their militaries’ right to intervene in politics. In Turkey, however, the MGK was established with the aim of guaranteeing this right in all security issues. The 1961 Constitution stipulated that the MGK should meet under the chairmanship of the President of Turkey, with the attendance of ministers along with the Chief of General Staff (CGS) and his force representatives. The task of the MGK was to give assistance to the Cabinet to make decisions and ensure coordination on national security. Later amendments, made at the request of the military junta between 1971 and 1973, increased the military’s
power in the MGK, changing the expression “force representatives” to “force commanders,” changing the word “inform” in relation to the authority of the MGK to “recommend,” and removing the phrase “lending assistance.” The 1982 Constitution, made following the 1980 coup under the oversight of the military junta, further significantly increased the MGK’s powers. First, it specified the number of civilian participants by defining who the participant ministers would be. Second, it ensured the participation of the Commander of the Turkish Gendarmerie Forces so that the number of civilian members would not exceed the number of military officers. Third, the broad phrase of “keeping the peace and prosperity of the state” was added regarding the tasks of the MGK. Finally, and also most importantly, the political role of the military was significantly increased with the incorporation of the expression that “the decisions deemed necessary by the MGK, about the precautions to be taken, are taken notice of by the cabinet primarily.”

Reform of the MGK started in 2001. First, the Minister of Justice and Deputy Prime Ministers were added to increasing the number of civilian members to a majority so as to reduce the military’s power within the MGK. In addition, regarding the decisions of MGK, the phrase “would primarily be taken into consideration by the Cabinet” was changed to “would primarily be evaluated by the Cabinet.” While the EU considered these reforms to be important steps, more comprehensive reforms were introduced with the adoption of the seventh harmonization package in 2003. This package ordered the appointment of the MGK Secretary General from among the civilian members; the authority of the CGS to select and confirm the MGK Secretary General was transferred to the Prime Minister; the frequency of MGK meetings was revised from monthly to bimonthly; and, most importantly, while the authority of the MGK was reduced to an advisory role on issues such as determining, establishing, and implementing the national security policy of the state, its initiatives also had to be presented to the Prime Minister before applying these decisions. That is, the MGK’s secret cabinet role was ended with it becoming just an advisory body.

The Turkish military, however, used to also intervene in both domestic and foreign policy issues through informal mechanisms, such as speeches, press statements and declarations given by senior military members. For instance, the former CGSs, Hilmi Özkök and Yaşar Büyükanıt, applied these mechanisms several times between 2002 and 2007, when the ruling AKP wished to introduce some regulations that the military ideologically opposed. The made statements against the AKP’s desire to allow women to wear headscarves at official state functions, support schools established by religious movements, ease the entrance of Vocational Religious High School students to universities, permit the wearing of headscarves in higher education institutions and nominate Abdullah Gül, whose spouse wears a headscarf, for the presidency. Today, the military’s application of such informal mechanisms has almost ended. This mainly stems from an amendment accepted in the constitutional referendum in 2010. Article 145 of the constitution previously granted military officers a broad judicial protection regarding any political intervention. In contrast, the amended article stipulated that criminal offenses committed by
officers against state security, the constitutional order and its functioning should in future be tried by civilian not military courts. This has strongly discouraged officers from speaking about political issues. In addition, investigations into the alleged Ergenekon organization and associated coup plans have also discouraged officers from political expression. The Ergenekon investigations, which started in 2007 and have accused many retired and active officers of being members of an illegal organization and preparing coup plans to overthrow the AKP government, have forced the General Staff to retreat to a defensive position. In order to protect its public prestige, the General Staff has almost completely stopped making public political statements. Both of these developments possibly contributed to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s declaration, in May 2011, that the military had stopped making statements on political issues.10

The clause stating that “The duty of the military is to protect and watch over the Turkish motherland and the Turkish republic as delineated by the constitution” was incorporated into Article 34 of the Internal Service Law of the military in 1935. After the 1960 coup, this expression was added to Article 35 of the Internal Service Law. This expression has provided significant legitimization to military leaders for their coups. For example, they claimed that they made the 1971 and 1980 coups to protect the Turkish motherland from internal threats of communism and fascism in accordance with the right provided to them by law. The leaders of the 1971 indirect coup argued that they had used their legal right, referring to Article 35, to issue a memorandum with the aim of ending violence between rightist and leftist groups. Similarly, in 2011, in his testimony to the Attorney General, Kenan Evren, who led the September 12 coup, stated that “due to constitutional institutions were not functioning because of the conditions of that time (violence between rightist and leftist groups), we seized control of the country using our authority under Article 35 of the Internal Service Law.”11 The leaders of the 1997 indirect coup, who claimed that is aimed to prevent the rise of political Islam, also referred to Article 35. The Deputy CGS of the time, Çevik Bir, currently in prison for having played a major role in the 1997 coup, testified to the Attorney General that keeping records about religious people through intelligence networks had been legitimate “because Article 35 gave us this duty.”12

The Turkish parliament often considered amendments to remove the military’s power granted by Article 35. In October 2012, for instance, Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ said that “we are working to change Article 35 . . . the government will radically amend it . . . it is impossible to keep democracy and law standing with such an element.”13 In addition, the ruling AKP promised at its grand congress of September 2012 to remove Article 35.14 The Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), the main opposition party, and other opposition parties were also disturbed by Article 35. The CHP’s leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, several times underlined the urgent need to amend it.15 The presence of Article 35 was also regularly criticized in the EU’s progress reports. The 2012 progress report, for example, complained “No change was made to the Internal Service Law for the Turkish armed forces, which defines the duties of the military and contains an article leaving the
military significant potential scope for intervention in politics.’’ Finally, in July 2013, Article 35 was democratically revised as follows:

the duty of the armed forces is to protect the Turkish homeland against threats and dangers coming from abroad, to ensure the preservation and strengthening of military power in a manner that will provide deterrence, to fulfill the duties abroad according to the decisions of the parliament and help maintain international peace.

With this revision, which gave great emphasis to external threats, the military’s ability to use the pretext of internal threats to stage coups and intervene in politics was abolished.

The Problems of Democratic Governance of Defense and Security Sectors

Reforms to prevent the military’s intervention in politics have significantly contributed to supporting democratic civil–military relations in Turkey. Thus, it is possible to argue that Turkey has successfully dealt with the first-generation problems. However, it still has significant second-generation problems regarding the democratic governance of the defense and security sectors. Particular issues concern building effective defense policy-making structures, establishing meaningful parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors and developing wider civil society input into defense and security debates.

Building Effective Defense Policy-Making Structures

The state’s inability to develop and implement defense policy is the one of the significant problems regarding democratic governance of the defense and security sectors. Overcoming this problem entails, on a macro level, governmental/ministerial control of defense policy and, at a lower level, the creation of civilian bureaucratic structures and the employment of qualified and trained civilian staff in defense institutions, notably the Ministry of Defense. In Turkey, the biggest problems in this area concern the General Staff’s formal link to the Prime Ministry, in contrast to EU member states where it is connected to the defense ministry, the more extensive duties of the CGS than the Minister of National Defense, the presence of military officers serving in key positions in the MoND Under-secretariat and the predominance of inexperienced civil servants in the Under-secretariat of Defense Industries of the MoND.

Regarding the Prime Ministry connection, the General Staff was connected to the MoND in 1949; however, the 1961 Constitution, under military pressure, reconnected the General Staff to the Prime Ministry. This regulation placed the General Staff outside the ordinary duties and authorities of the ministries of defense, most importantly regarding the formation of defense policy. Discussions about connecting the General Staff to the MoND are still underway in the Turkish parliament.
addition, the two laws enacted in 1970 clearly defined the duties of the CGS and the Minister of National Defense. These grant the CGS significant political autonomy in determining defense policy, creating the military budget, shaping future armament systems and weapons production, intelligence gathering, all appointments, and internal security. The MoND is tasked only with conscription, arms procurement, and logistical requirements. Thus, it is reduced to being the bureaucratic–administrative office of the General Staff.

When active or retired military officers occupy top positions in defense institutions, due to their years of service in the military they easily tend to choose their preferences in line with military expectations by ignoring the government. This risk can be prevented through placing well-trained civilian personnel in critical positions in defense institutions, crucially the defense ministry because of its wide role in defense policy-making. For instance, as Felipe Aguero observes, during the civil–military relations reform process in Spain, one of the significant factors ensuring civilian supremacy has been the high level of civilian appointments to key positions in the defense ministry. Similarly, according to Samuel Huntington, the appointments of a civilian secretary and staff to the defense ministry in the USA are the key to maintaining civilian control. In Turkey, the MoND is very problematic in these respects. It currently has two under-secretariats, namely the MoND Under-secretariat and the Under-secretariat of Defense Industries. While military officers occupied key positions in the former, including the under-secretary who is a lieutenant general, the latter, established in 1985 to develop defense industry infrastructure to decrease Turkey’s foreign dependency, heavily consists of inexperienced civilian staff.

Parliamentary Oversight of the Defense and Security Sectors

It is commonly believed that security policy is a natural task of the executive due to its knowledge and capacity to act quickly, while parliaments are not generally seen as suitable institutions because of their insufficient knowledge and time-consuming procedures regarding the security policy. In order to ensure a functioning democracy, however, it is crucial for parliament to oversee the executive in all policy areas, with parliamentary oversight of security policy being particularly important. If it is wrongly developed and implemented, security policy greatly harms a country’s political, economic and social stability. Beyond security policy, however, in order to enhance democratization, ensuring parliamentary oversight in all defense and security matters is vital.

It is possible to provide at least four reasons to show why parliaments should play a significant role in overseeing the defense and security sectors. First, parliaments are the cornerstones of democracy’s prevention of autocratic rule. In democracies, it is a principle that no institution and policy area of the state remain outside the control of elected parliamentary representatives, with parliamentary oversight of the defense and security sectors being crucial for full democratic development. By effectively fulfilling their tasks, parliaments can limit the powers of the executive in defense and security sectors, which can significantly contribute to checking the authoritarian
tendencies of the executive. Second, there is a common principle that there can be “no taxation without representation.” From the creation of the first parliaments, representatives wanted to explain their ideas on security policy matters by claiming no taxation without representation. Because security sector institutions take a significant share of the budget, it is critical in democracies that parliaments effectively oversee the defense budget in order to evaluate whether it is effectively and efficiently used or not. Third, parliaments can create legal parameters regarding security issues. In practice, the executive drafts laws on security matters. Parliaments, however, can suggest amendments on drafted laws to reflect new thinking on security, and oversee their implementation. Finally, representatives in parliaments are in suitable position to bring the opinions and worries of the public to parliament, and to reflect their ideas in laws and politics regarding security.

Turkey’s problems regarding parliamentary oversight of its defense and security sectors are related to the Turkish parliament’s inability to scrutinize defense policy, insufficient oversight of the defense budget, and deficient legislation authority. Parliamentary scrutiny of the government’s defense policy is a customary practice in democratic regimes. Beyond controlling the budget, the Turkish parliament has to also scrutinize the defense policy and its application. It has remained, however, very weak in this regard because of its insufficient authority, facilities, and capabilities. The difficulty of obtaining information due to a broad understanding of a “military secret” and deputies’ lack of knowledge and interest in defense policy issues are the main reasons behind parliament’s weakness. The preparation and ratification method of the MGSB well exemplifies parliament’s incompetency in this area. According to Law No: 2945, national security policy is defined as the policy covering the principles of the course of internal, external, and defense actions determined by the Council of Ministers, within the views set out by the MGK, with the aim of ensuring national security and achieving national objectives. The MGSB, classified as “top secret,” the enforcement tool of these policies, is prepared by the MGK and ratified by the Council of Ministers. Therefore, parliament has no authority.

In democratic regimes, parliaments exert ex post oversight of the budget after its adoption by taking help from independent institutions. On behalf of parliaments, these institutions are tasked with checking whether the expenditures are made in consistent with the law or not. In Turkey’s case, the constitution makes the Court of Accounts (CoA) responsible for auditing, on behalf of parliament, all the accounts relating to the revenue, expenditure and property of state institutions financed by the general and subsidiary budgets, taking final decisions on the acts and accounts of the responsible officials, and exercising the functions required of it by law in matters of inquiry, auditing, and judgment. However, in practice, the CoA had been exempted from auditing the military’s assets for many years following amendments adopted in the CoA Law. In 2003, the amendment gave the CoA authority to audit any state institution if required by the Turkish parliament. Yet the same amended law stipulates that, if parliament demands an audit of the military’s assets, this can only be done through a “secret” regulation to be adopted by the Cabinet after consulting the CGS and the CoA. In 2004, the last paragraph of
Article 160 of the constitution was removed, which had stated that “The procedure for auditing, on behalf of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, of state property in possession of the armed forces shall be regulated by law in accordance with the principles of secrecy required by national defense.” This allowed the CoA to audit the military’s assets, although the new law to implement this auditing rule was only adopted in 2010 after a six-and-a-half year delay. The new CoA Law (No. 6085) abolished the CoA’s obligation to get parliament’s request before auditing state institutions. Thus, the CoA was given authority to start its investigations without seeking parliament’s permission. However, the same law stipulated that it could only explain its reports on the military’s assets to the public only after consulting the military. This means that the CoA’s auditing of the military’s assets must still be evaluated by the military within the framework of military secrecy rather than democratic accountability.

The Turkish parliament’s legislative authority regarding defense issues remains problematic for at least two important reasons. First, like the other parliaments in many countries, it has a commission working on defense and security policy, the National Defense Committee (Milli Savunma Komisyonu, MSK). However, according to an internal regulation of the Turkish parliament, the MSK can only review draft legislation submitted by the parliamentary presidency, which means that it lacks the authority to determine the defense budget, defense procurement, and security policy. In addition, proceedings and activities of the MSK and its meetings cannot be officially recorded. Second, in Turkey, the parliament’s Plan and Budget Committee (Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonu) evaluates the defense budget, before sending it to the general assembly for ratification. Although this procedure is generally the same in democratic countries, while discussing the defense budget in the general assembly, deputies from both the ruling party and opposition parties simply praise the military, declaring that the heroic Turkish military’s budget should be even larger. Due to deputies’ attitudes in the general assembly’s sessions, which largely stem from nationalist sensitivities and lack of knowledge about defense issues, the Turkish parliament misses the opportunity to exercise control over the defense budget.

Developing Wider Civil Society Input into Defense and Security Debates

The engagement of civil society in defense and security debates, which is usually neglected in civil–military relations studies, is actually important for both policymakers and the public. Civil society’s engagement takes place through civil society organizations, including think tanks, the media, and defense academies in universities. Regarding the democratization of civil–military relations, they perform three functions. First, they prepare alternative and independent studies on defense and security issues, giving themselves the capacity to inform the public and policymakers. Second, civil society, through newspapers, journals, and meetings, creates an opportunity for debate on defense and security issues. Finally, civil society attracts the interest of other actors in defense and security issues through their evaluations and criticisms.
In Turkey, for several major reasons, civil society organizations fail to engage in this debate. First, and most importantly, for decades such organizations had been seen as the main sources of threats against the Turkish state. Thus, their development had been limited by both civilian governments under military pressure and by successive military juntas. Due to the strong state legacy inherited from the Ottoman Empire, the state imposed top-down reforms to transform and modernize Turkish society in the first two decades after the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923. During those years, civil society organizations were almost non-existent because, in order to achieve secular and nationalist reforms, the state totally destroyed them. With the beginning of the multi-party period in 1945, new civil society organizations emerged, but repeated military coups prevented the development and engagement of democratic civil society organizations. In particular, after each coup, although partly excluding the 1960 coup, the juntas, which saw civil society organizations as the main sources of communist, Kurdish nationalist, and Islamist threats against the state, made constitutional and legal amendments that limited their development. The state’s massive repression of civil society organizations continued until Turkey made significant reforms to strengthen civil society under EU pressure between 2001 and 2004. Despite these reforms, however, civil society organizations still face difficulties to function properly. In short, because of decades of suppression and only recent and partial activation, Turkish civil society organizations are far from engaging in defense and security debates.

Second, due to the reluctance of the Ottoman Sultan and his government to resist the occupying forces in Anatolia at the end of World War I, it was Turkish officers who started the War of Independence to establish the new Turkish republic. Thus, they are still seen as the people’s heroes, and the majority of the public regard any criticism of the military as high treason. This makes it very difficult for civil society organizations to present criticisms of the military or its officers while debating defense and security issues. Third, secrecy in the security sector is a major problem in Turkey because it is presented as a key element of security, making it very difficult for civil society organizations to obtain information about issues regarding defense and security in order to debate them. Finally, the state’s own policies aimed at structuring the civil society organizations, and the variety of pressures applied on them, have prevented Turkish organizations from developing more awareness of the importance of democratic civilian oversight of the defense and security sectors. Thus, they have failed to investigate these sectors sufficiently so far. This final reason also clarifies why think tanks in Turkey, which are a relatively new form, have remained very weak in this area, with the exception of the Istanbul-based Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Türkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Vakfı, TESEV), which has successfully maintained projects and organizes regular seminars and conferences.

The majority of the media in Turkey still refrain from staging defense and security debates. This is because, in the past, for example, during the February 28 process, the military managed to gain ideological control over the media, particularly by threatening media owners, to the extent that various prominent journalists were sacked from their jobs. However, in recent years, a few newspapers, such as Taraf,
Zaman, and Yeni Şafak, have frequently discussed defense and security issues. In this context, it is worth mentioning that it was Taraf that first courageously revealed the coup plans against the AKP government (that later became part of the Ergenekon investigation), such as Cage (Kafes) and Sledgehammer (Balyoz), and criticized the internal operations of the military. Nevertheless, apart from the media’s general fear of the military, there are in fact certain constraints preventing them from debating defense and security issues. First, parliament failed to clarify the definition of state secrets in the Right to Information Act, implemented in 2004. Given the harsh punishments for breaking this law, journalists have hesitated to publish certain information. Second, since the February 28 process, the military has refused to accredit newspapers and journalists whose ideological approaches conflict with its own. As a result, most newspapers have become nothing more than the publishers of military’s views. Finally, there is no center for defense journalism aiming to educate journalists about defense and security issues in the faculties of communication in Turkish universities. Journalists therefore cannot easily overcome their lack of knowledge and improve their professionalism in these areas. Many journalists in Turkey, rather than being known for their knowledge, skills and experience, are known more for their close proximity to certain military commanders, working almost as their press officers.

Defense academies within the framework of universities are common in North American and West European countries. By providing students high-quality defense and security policy education and a suitable research environment, these institutions aim to prepare the future leaders and experts for ministries of defense and civilian agencies. They are also very useful for debating security and defense issues through their publications and conferences. Yet, despite all these benefits, there is no defense academy in Turkish universities.

Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief in Turkey, democratic civil–military relations cannot be achieved only by getting the military out of politics. Rather, this requires fully democratic governance of the defense and security sectors. In recent years, Turkey has significantly limited the military’s ability to intervene in politics through several constitutional and other legal amendments, notably reforming the MGK. Thus, it could be argued that Turkey has successfully dealt with the first-generation problems of a country experiencing democratization of civil–military relations. However, problems concerning democratic governance of the defense and security sectors, the second-generation problems, still continue in Turkey and are a serious threat to the chances of developing fully democratic civil–military relations in the country.

In order to overcome the second-generation problems, the first reform area that Turkey could consider is building effective defense policy-making structures. Turkey could achieve this through three steps. First, the General Staff should be linked to the MoND rather than the Prime Ministry to make it subject to the MoND’s bureaucratic authority. This would, second, immediately pave the way for
the transfer of the CGS’s broad authorities provided by the introduction of two laws in 1970 in formulating defense policy to the Minister of National Defense. The first two reforms would allow the MoND to stop working merely as the administrative office of the General Staff as it does presently. Third, the officers in the MoND Under-secretariat should be replaced with civilian staff to prevent the military imposing its preferences on defense policy-making. In addition, positions in the Under-secretariat of Defense Industries should be taken by relevantly qualified and experienced staff in defense industry matters to enable proper decisions to be taken.

In a fully functioning democracy, parliament must oversee the defense and security sectors. In this respect, parliamentary oversight remains very weak in Turkey. To remedy this weakness, Turkey can introduce three significant reforms. First, the ability of the Turkish parliament to scrutinize defense policy can be strengthened by defining military secrets much more narrowly to improve the deputies’ access to information. In addition, parliament should have the authority to prepare and ratify the MGSB to limit the power of the executive. Second, the CoA’s role in auditing the military’s assets should be strengthened by removing the stipulation for it to consult with the military before presenting its audit reports to the public. Third, Turkey should increase the MSK’s powers by giving it the authority to determine the defense budget, defense procurement, and security policy.

Civil society organizations’ weak participation in defense and security debates stems from their general problems. After many years of state pressure, the engagement of civil society organizations in democratic social life has improved in recent years to some extent due to EU-mandated reforms, in particular between 2001 and 2004. However, these organizations still face serious challenges. In particular, the majority of Turkish people still hesitate to join civil society organizations due to the bureaucratic procedures that complicate their founding and functioning, and the risk of facing huge fines. It is commonly accepted that these factors significantly hinder their development. Thus, in order to support civil society organizations, the government should consider decreasing fines significantly and abolishing the bureaucratic obstacles stipulated in the Law on Associations and the Regulation on Associations. These reforms could also help increase the number of think tanks, such as those working on defense and security issues, which also have the status of associations in Turkey.

Like civil society organizations, the media in Turkey is also a weak participant in defense and security debates. To correct this, the Right to Information Act should clarify the definition of state secret to encourage journalists to report information on defense and security issues. In addition, the accreditation power of the General Staff should be abolished to stop the Turkish media acting like the General Staff’s press office. Finally, the government should encourage the establishment of centers for defense journalism in the faculties of communication in Turkish universities to professionalize journalists regarding defense and security issues and defense academies within the framework of universities to educate and prepare civilian leaders and experts for defense institutions and civilian agencies.
Notes

1. The PKK is a Kurdish nationalist organization which from 1984 to 2013 carried out terror acts against Turkey to establish an independent Kurdistan. It is listed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the EU, and the USA.


5. Özbudun, Contemporary Turkish Politics, 120–1.

6. Desch, Civilian Control, 14–5.


10. Övür, “Artık Çok Konuşan.”


18. In February 2013, the four political parties represented in parliament, the ruling AKP, the CHP, the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyeti Hareket Partisi), and the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi), have reached an agreement in the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission (CRC), which was established in the parliament to prepare a new constitution, to connect the General Staff to the MoND in the new constitution, see “Parties Agree to Subordinate General Staff to Defense Ministry,” Zaman Daily, February 22, 2013. Accessed May 29, 2013. http://www.zaman.com.tr/todays_parties-agree-to-subordinate-general-staff-to-defense-ministry_2056886.html.

Considering that some political parties made independent attempts in the past to connect the General Staff to the MoND, the consensus that the current parliamentary parties have reached in the CRC is a very significant step.


20. Ünsaldı, Türkiye’de Asker, 14.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.


25. Ibid., 20.


27. Akay, Security Sector, 12.

28. Ibid., 15.

29. Ibid., 16.
31. Ibid., 15–6.
34. In this context, significant improvements were achieved with the adoption of the second, third, and seventh harmonization packages. In addition, in July 2004, entirely new and more liberal law was adopted on associations (Law No. 5231). For details of these reforms, see Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism*.
35. As the EU indicated in its 2012 progress report for Turkey, civil society organizations continued to face fines, closure proceedings, and administrative obstacles to their operation. Equally important, the EU, in the same report, emphasized the need to revise the law on demonstrations and meetings, to investigate allegations against members of the security forces for use of excessive force and to prosecute where appropriate (European Commission, “Turkey 2012,” 22–3).
37. Ibid., 21; Ensaroğlu, “Sivil Toplumun,” 61.
38. The military, which thought that the secularism was at the target of political Islamists, dictated some decisions to the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) coalition government (Refahyol government) in the MGK meeting on February 28, 1997. Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan’s making no move to implement the decisions taken in the February 28 meeting after two MGK meetings caused the military to take a tougher line. In this respect, the military which did not want to overthrow the government with a direct intervention, started to organize contact meetings and briefings to explain the danger of political Islam in Turkey. Consequently, Erbakan resigned and wished to transfer Prime Ministry to his partner Tansu Çiller to gain time. However, this attempt encountered President Süleyman Demirel obstacle. Demirel, in order to end the Refahyol government, commissioned Mesut Yılmaz, leader of the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi) to form the government, instead of assigning DYP leader Çiller, who had more chairs in the parliament. Thus, a government, legitimately acceded to power after elections, was repealed. This period is called 28 February process in Turkish political history.
39. *Taraf* is a liberal newspaper in Turkey. Shortly after its foundation in November 2007, it has distinguished itself from other newspapers in Turkey by opposing the military’s political intervention. *Zaman*, founded in 1986, is the most popular newspaper of the supporters of the Fethullah Gülen movement, the powerful religious and social movement in Turkey. It is printed in 11 countries and distributed in 35 countries. *Yenisafak*, founded in 1994, is a conservative newspaper and supports the AKP.

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The changing role of the military in Turkish politics: democratization through coup plots?

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The changing role of the military in Turkish politics: democratization through coup plots?

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The exposure of alleged coup plots in 2007 has shaken the guardian role of the Turkish military in politics. What were the conditions that led to the exposure of the coups and what is their significance for the future of Turkish democracy? Drawing on insights from southern Europe, the article argues that failed coup plots can lead to democratic civil–military relations especially if they work simultaneously with other facilitating conditions, such as increasing acceptance of democratic attitudes among officers, consensus among civilians over the role of the military, and the influence of external actors, such as the European Union. The article focuses on such domestic and international factors to analyse the transformation of the Turkish military, the splits within the armed forces and the resulting plots. It argues that one positive outcome of the exposed conspiracies in Turkey has been the enactment of new institutional amendments that would eradicate the remaining powers of the military. Yet, a negative outcome of the coup investigations has been an increase in polarization and hostility. Turkish democracy still lacks mutual trust among significant political groups, which creates unfavourable conditions for democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Turkey; southern Europe; democratic consolidation; civil–military relations; democratic control of the armed forces; failed coups; Ergenekon; Balyoz

Introduction

Since the beginning of the last decade, Turkey has been going through an important transformation in its civil–military relations, and the position of the armed forces in politics and society is being widely questioned by the public. The events that led to this sea change gained a new momentum in March 2007, when a weekly magazine published the alleged diaries of a former commander of the navy.¹ The diaries contained information that could be interpreted as evidence of a military conspiracy against the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in 2003–2004. The publication of the diaries was followed by other alleged coup

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conspiracies and eventually by the start of an investigation, known as the Ergenekon case, in June 2007. More than 300 people, including journalists, academics and retired and active duty military officers from various ranks, have been implicated in the coup plans and have been put on trial since October 2008. In early 2010, another alleged plot entitled Balyoz (Sledgehammer) was discovered, resulting in the start of a separate trial in December against close to 200 suspected officers. The number of armed forces personnel that are being prosecuted is unparalleled in Turkish history especially once it is considered that the Balyoz and Ergenekon cases have led to the arrest of one-tenth of the Turkish Armed Forces’ generals and admirals. The court cases have raised doubts about the intentions of the AKP and whether the government is using the allegations to weaken and harm the reputation of the military. Even though it is still uncertain how the trials will be resolved and if all of the accused officers will be found guilty, it is by now clear that several officers within the military were involved in coup plots in 2003–2004.

Military coups, even when they fail, are directly linked to questions of democracy. In cases like Turkey, where the military has intervened in politics several times and has prerogatives and autonomy, civilian control over the armed forces is a necessary condition for democratic consolidation. There are several possible routes to civilian control of the armed forces, and failed coup attempts can function as one such route. Exposed coup plots can lead to democratic civil–military relations especially if they work simultaneously with other facilitating conditions, such as increasing acceptance of democratic values among officers, consensus among civilians over the role of the military, and the influence of external actors, such as the European Union (EU).

The first part of this article will focus on such domestic and international factors to map out the transformation of the Turkish military. It will be argued that the changes in the attitudes of the general staff were due to external dynamics, such as prospects of membership in the EU and changing circumstances in Turkey’s neighbourhood after the end of the Cold War, especially in Iraq and Cyprus. Domestically, the economic and political success of the government and changing public attitudes toward the military also led to a shift in the perceptions and attitudes of some military officers. However, the article will argue that this transformation did not cover all of the factions in the armed forces, resulting in a split in the military. Hardliner officers were disposed to a military intervention in the early 2000s as a result of their perceptions of threat in domestic and foreign politics. Yet, these plots were exposed without having a chance to be executed because they faced a strong reaction from the government and public opinion, and the political context was not right for an intervention.

The second part of the article will address the significance of the exposed plots for the future of Turkish democracy. The routes to democratic civil–military relations and the possible influence of failed coups can be analysed by comparing Turkey with southern European cases. Even though this article does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of democratic consolidation in Portugal, Spain and
Greece, it nevertheless draws insights from these successful cases of civilian control over the military. The three southern European countries completed their transition from authoritarian regimes in the 1970s. Because their previous repressive regimes were either directly or indirectly controlled by the military, one of the biggest challenges during democratization was civilian control over the military. Although Turkey has never had an authoritarian regime since its transition to multiparty politics in 1946, it still shares with the southern European countries the influence of the military in politics as a challenge to democratic consolidation.

Simultaneously with their democratization processes, Spain, Portugal and Greece were also negotiating their membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). Since the 1980s the EEC has transformed into the European Union (EU), and membership criteria, as well as the *acquis* that candidate countries are expected to adopt, have evolved into a thick framework of conditionality. In the case of Turkish accession, the prospect of full membership and the EU’s credibility is comparatively low since the EU as a whole disseminates mixed signals on eventual Turkish membership. Yet, the possible role the EU could play in Turkish civil–military relations is similar to the southern European cases, especially in the early 2000s when the credibility of the EU was higher. Thus, given parallel domestic problems and the influence of an analogous external actor, we can ask if civil–military relations could be reformed and thereby democracy could consolidate in Turkey in comparable ways to southern Europe.

The experience of failed coup plots during democratization in Turkey is similar to the southern European cases. In Turkey, civilian control of the military has started to increase, partially as a result of the coup attempts. This is certainly an important step toward democratic consolidation. However, in contrast to southern Europe, the exposed plots have also led to polarization among political groups, which is not conducive to consolidation. One of the arguments of the article is that the changing role of the military in politics leads to mixed results for democratization. While the civilian control of the armed forces is increasing, mistrust and suspicion among political actors about each other’s loyalty to democracy is growing, bringing about the continuation of unconsolidated democracy.

**The significance of civilian control of the military for democratic consolidation**

By definition, one of the components of liberal democracy is civilian control of the military. As most scholarly definitions of democracy stress, in a liberal democracy no unelected group can have reserved domains and hold tutelary or veto powers that can obstruct the policy-making capabilities of the elected officials. In other words, if in a country the military exercises political powers and restricts the decision-making capabilities of the executive and the legislature, it is not possible to refer to that country as a democracy. Turkey has not fulfilled this condition of a liberal democracy since the first military intervention in 1960. Yet, except for brief interludes of direct military rule, Turkey has held relatively free and fair elections, qualifying it as a limited electoral democracy. Thus, in the Turkish case, any
improvement in the civilian control of the military is significant because it indicates a move away from a minimal democracy to a more substantial liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{7}

After a country has fulfilled the procedural conditions of democracy, the process of democratization does not come to an end and there are certain ‘attitudes and habits that must be cultivated before democracy could be considered consolidated’.\textsuperscript{8} Consolidation refers to attitudinal and behavioural support for the regime among all significant actors, including strategically located members of the military, political parties and a sizeable portion of the population that can be mobilized by political elites.\textsuperscript{9} There is widespread attitudinal and behavioural support for democracy in consolidated regimes, where all actors mutually trust each other and feel secure. In contrast, unconsolidated democracies are characterized by vicious circles, where political actors mutually suspect each other’s intentions and loyalty to democracy, and therefore look for non-democratic means to secure their positions.\textsuperscript{10}

The attitudinal dimension of democratic consolidation is the second reason why civilian control of the military is important for democratization. If a faction in the military thinks of overthrowing the government by threatening, planning or executing an intervention, this is a clear indication that democracy is not the ‘only game in town’.\textsuperscript{11} Democracy fails to consolidate when there are conspirators who do not adhere to democracy and do not ‘regard [democracy’s] key political institutions as the only legitimate framework of contestation’.\textsuperscript{12} In this respect, the exposed coup plots in Turkey in the recent years are an indicator that Turkish democracy was not consolidated in the early 2000s.\textsuperscript{13}

Changing attitudes of military officers as a source of civilian control

If the military must come under the control of civilians for the consolidation of liberal democracy, how can the civilians curtail the powers of the military, especially in cases like Turkey where the military already has important political prerogatives? Certainly, one way of initiating civilian control is by introducing legal changes in the constitution and relevant laws with an attempt to eliminate the tutelary powers and reserved domains of the military.\textsuperscript{14} While such privileges of the military may be entrenched in the system by legal documents and institutions, they can also be the result of deep-rooted and informal beliefs, such as the military’s definition of its own duty as the custodian of the nation. As a result, official mechanisms of civilian control and changes in the legislation are hardly sufficient to guarantee military compliance with civilian authority. Moreover, legal changes are not enough to eradicate interventionist tendencies in the armed forces and facilitate support for democracy. Thus, for complete civilian control of the military and democratization, the attitudes of the officers must also be transformed.

The early literature on civil–military relations, in fact, drew attention to the value of officer corps as an important mechanism of civilian control. Huntington, in his seminal book \textit{The Soldier and the State}, argued that military professionalism
would guarantee control because the ‘professional military ethic’ upholds obedience to civilians as a supreme military virtue.  Writing a few years after Huntington, in his analysis of the American officer corps, Janowitz similarly maintained that the officer ‘is subject to civilian control, not only because of the “the rule of law” and tradition, but also because of self-imposed professional standards and meaningful integration with civilian values’. Despite their differences in approach, both Huntington and Janowitz reasoned that civilian control could be achieved through the internalization of certain values and ethics of professionalism by officers.

The subsequent literature on civil–military relations has identified two interrelated developments that explain modifications in the attitudes of officers: external context, such as changes in international threats or membership in international organizations; and domestic factors, such as changing societal attitudes toward the military. A comparative analysis of western democracies, for instance, has shown that the end of the Cold War and collapse of the communist threat have ‘ushered in a new era in international relations and ... concomitant changes in the structure and culture of the armed forces’. Public attitude in western democracies is now ‘indifferent’ toward the military and today’s ‘postmodern’ militaries do not regard defending the homeland as their only duty. Indeed, the ‘postmodern’ military model demonstrates that the values of the officers are subject to change due to international and domestic circumstances irrespective of democratization and even in countries that do not have regime-threatening problems in civil–military relations.

However, changes in the attitudes of the officers can also have a significant impact on democratization in countries that are struggling to prevent military interventions. As Danopoulos argues for the southern European cases, ‘the values and beliefs of the military do not exist in a vacuum; instead they are the sum of general societal or environmental adaptations (including international factors), perceived by the military...’. After the southern European transitions from authoritarian regimes in the mid-1970s, the international context, external threats and membership in international organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the EEC, led to important adjustments in the perspective of military officers, with positive repercussions in democratic consolidation. In Spain, Portugal and Greece, ‘NATO provided an opportunity for redirecting military missions to external professional concerns, and this certainly aided democratization’. Although Greece and Portugal were already members of NATO before the transition, external threats from Turkey and the African colonies respectively preoccupied the armed forces with non-domestic missions.

Albeit through different mechanisms, EEC membership in the three southern European countries had a parallel impact on civil–military relations. Because civilian control of the military was one of the implicit accession criteria of the Community, civilians were keen on initiating mechanisms of control and formally eliminating the military’s reserved domains and tutelary powers. This was nowhere more apparent than in Portugal, which had a constitution written under military tutelage and therefore objected to by the EEC. In 1982, Portugal carried
out important reforms and reduced the powers of the president, abolished the Council of Revolution and redrafted the National Defence Law. These legal changes that eliminated the privileges of the military contributed in important respects to the consolidation of democracy in Portugal.

The influence of the EEC in southern Europe, however, was not only institutional, but also attitudinal. In the late 1970s and early 1980s gradually the majority of society started to perceive EEC integration as a guarantee of democracy and all major political parties reached a policy consensus on membership. One indirect consequence of this convergence over the EEC was the unacceptability of military interventions that would stand in the way of accession. In both Spain and Greece, for example, the number of citizens who preferred authoritarianism to democracy in the 1980s was quite low. The previous authoritarian regime in Spain was established after an intense conflict between the left and right, and in Greece the colonels initially attempted to justify their junta by the internal threat of communism. But by the early 1980s, when the centre-left socialist parties of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) won the elections in Greece and Spain respectively, there was no perception of threat that legitimized an overt military intervention and the establishment of an authoritarian regime. Moreover, the electoral strength of the socialist governments of Greece and Spain resulted in the persistence of reforms in civil–military relations. Thus, EEC membership, combined with a decrease in the internal perceptions of threat, led to new attitudes among the officers indirectly, through changes in the behaviours of political parties and society toward democracy and the military.

While some military officers adjusted to democratization, there was still a faction in both the Spanish and the Greek militaries that felt threatened by the transformation of politics and civil–military relations. These hard-line officers, who had not given attitudinal support for democracy, envisioned overthrowing the civilian government and planned coups in order to restore the prerogatives of the military. In southern Europe, as elsewhere, the perceived challenges to national or corporate interests provided the motives disposing the hardliners to an intervention. But success of military interventions is eventually contingent on the political context and especially on the existence of civilian elite support and a general pro-coup climate in public opinion. In Spain and Greece the resistance of civilian elites and society to the coup attempts were among the most important factors that led to their failure, which started the final chain of events that eventually completed the transformation of the officer corps.

In Spain, after the February 1981 coup attempt ‘gradually but steadily a larger number of officers realized that democracy was there to stay and that the military ought to accommodate itself within it’. In Greece, after the collapse of the 1967–1974 junta that was opposed by the majority of the political groups, the officers learned ‘about the destructive consequences of political involvement’. The experience also led some Greek officers to feel ‘embarrassed and ashamed of the military’s seven years in government’. Even though after the transition to
democracy there were several attempts of military intervention, with the passing of
time, purges of officers and the imprisonment of coup-makers, the attitudes of the
majority of the officer corps changed.\textsuperscript{36}

In sum, for the consolidation of liberal democracy in a country with several
experiences of military interventions, such as Turkey, legal mechanisms of civilian
control over the armed forces must be accompanied by attitudinal changes in the
military and a belief among the majority of the officers that democracy is the
‘only game in town’. There can be several paths that lead to this transformation.
International context and prospects of membership in international organizations,
such as the EU, might lead to a reassessment of the role of the armed forces in poli-
tics both within the military and among the civilians. Changing attitudes of the
public toward the military might also provide the extra drive for the officer
corps to alter their perceptions. However, not all officers will readily accept the
new role of the military. In fact, hard-liners might perceive the changes as a
threat to the corporate interests and autonomy of the military. Under those circum-
stances, a failed coup can prove to be the undesirable mechanism through which
the remaining hard-line elements within the military are forced to accept civilian
control over the armed forces.

A historical synopsis of Turkish civil–military relations

Civilian control of the armed forces is an important issue in Turkey given the coun-
try’s history. The influence of the military in politics could be traced as far back as
the Young Turk revolution of 1908 that forced the Ottoman Sultan to limit his rule
by a constitution.\textsuperscript{37} Following the defeat of the Empire in World War I, the rem-
nants of the Ottoman military and bureaucracy under the leadership of Mustafa
Kemal Atatürk, founded a secular nation-state in the 1920s. Even though in the
subsequent years of single-party rule the military did not intervene in politics
directly, some of the leaders of the Republican People’s Party and the first two pre-
sidents, Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, were military generals that had resigned from the
armed forces. During the single-party era, the military was given the duty ‘to
protect and defend the Turkish homeland and the Turkish republic, as determined
in the Constitution’.\textsuperscript{38} In these early years of the Republic, with the encouragement
of Atatürk himself, the military assumed the role of the guardian and vanguard of
the Turkish revolution with its nationalist and secular ideology.\textsuperscript{39}

During Turkey’s transition to democracy in 1950, the armed forces stayed in
the barracks and did not intervene against the electoral victory of the Democratic
Party (DP). However, the first overt coup that constituted a turning point in Turkish
civil–military relations came a decade later in 1960, and was followed by other
interventions in 1971 and 1980.\textsuperscript{40} After each coup, the military oversaw the
drafting of a new constitutional and legal framework, increasing also its own
autonomy and political powers within the system.

The National Security Council (MGK), which was first established by the 1960
coup, provided the military with important tutelary powers and reserved domains.
In the 1961 constitution, the MGK was envisioned as an institution that would advise the government. Its monthly meetings were composed of the military commanders, the president and government ministers. Changes in the constitution after the 1980 coup increased the powers of the MGK and required the cabinet to give priority to the decisions of the council meetings. In the subsequent years, the generals used the MGK and the military-dominated secretariat of the council as a mechanism to determine the security policies of the county, veto government policies and even force cabinets out of power.41 These institutional mechanisms allowed the military to perform its guardian role, without resorting to direct interventions or forceful coups.42

In the aftermath of the 1980 coup, the military was especially sensitive in protecting the unitary and secular characteristics of the Republic against what it perceived as threats of Kurdish separatism and Islamist activities. This position of the military was supported, or at least not openly contested, by the majority of the public and elites.43 In fact, since the first overt intervention of 1960, the military’s involvement in politics had been acceptable for the majority of society when the civilians failed to bring order and stability and when as a result public confidence in the politicians faltered.44

Since the late 1990s, however, similar to the southern European militaries, the Turkish military has started going through an important transformation. As identified above, there are two interrelated reasons for this change: one is external to the polity, and results from international threat perceptions and membership in international organizations; the other comes from domestic dynamics and relates especially to the changing attitudes of the civilians toward the military.

The transformation of the Turkish military and splits due to external dynamics

The changes in the attitudes of the general staff in Turkey could be traced back to the prospects of membership in the EU between 1999 and 2006, changing circumstances in Turkey’s neighbourhood after the Cold War and especially in Iraq, and policy modifications in Cyprus. Surely, it is not possible to isolate these changes from one another, from domestic circumstances or from broader conjectural dynamics that affected most western militaries after the Cold War. Indeed, taking into account all of these sources of change, Nil Şatana argues in a comprehensive analysis that the Turkish military, although not perfectly, seems to fit with the postmodern military pattern in important respects.45 Among the elites and civil-society organizations, there is rising opposition against military interventions in politics46 and ‘the behavioural changes in the military toward democracy seem possible because of [these] changes in the mother society and the military’s desire to keep up with their peers in NATO and the EU’.47 Even though the transformation of the military after the Cold War was not due only to circumstances that uniquely affected Turkey, the effects of EU candidacy, the war in Iraq and changing circumstances in Cyprus must still be analysed exclusively in the Turkish case.
These issues are significant not only because they led to a transformation of the perceptions and policy choices of some of the officers in the early 2000s, but also because they laid the foundations of the split within the military.

In the 1999 Helsinki Summit of the European Council, the EU reversed its 1997 decision and recognized Turkey as an official candidate of the European Union. This positive development triggered a reform process in Turkey, first under a coalition government and then more significantly under the AKP government. The amendments were geared toward implementing the political criteria of the EU, in particular strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Consequently, important institutional amendments curtailed the powers and autonomy of the military. These reforms can be grouped under three broad categories, namely: civilian oversight of the defence expenditure, the role of the military in the judiciary and amendments to the MGK (which in effect brought the Council to its original position envisioned by the 1960 constitution). In addition, the reforms aimed at increasing democratic liberties, such as freedom of speech and minority rights. Several packages that were enacted in the early 2000s changed the anti-terror law and granted the right to broadcast and obtain education in languages other than Turkish, including Kurdish.

The issue of minority rights was also related to changing circumstances in Turkey’s eastern border due to the invasion of Iraq by the United States. Since the first Gulf War, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) had been using northern Iraq as a base for its separatist activities and operations in Turkey. As a partner of the Pentagon in the war, the Turkish military had free access in the region after 1991, and therefore could retaliate by crossing the border. This privileged position of the military in the region was eliminated in March 2003, when the parliament rejected opening up Turkish lands to US troops. Even though the AKP government supported the decision to cooperate with the US, the unpopularity of the war among the public affected the final vote in parliament. After the start of the war, the humiliating detainment of eleven Turkish soldiers by Americans in July 2003 provided evidence of the changing circumstances. The military had not only lost influence in northern Iraq, but also could not work against Kurdish elements with its previous ally, the United States. As a consequence, the AKP adopted a European rhetoric on foreign policy with neighbours, emphasizing the use of soft power, dialogue and economic cooperation. In the subsequent years, in order to solve the Kurdish problem, the AKP government started to embrace a policy that balanced two strategies: one foreign and consisting of dialogue with the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq; and the other domestic and emphasizing individual rights and freedoms to minorities.

The AKP government also reversed Turkey’s long-held policy toward Cyprus by supporting UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s plan on the unification of the Greek and Turkish communities under a federal state. The status quo on the island had become a major obstacle to eventual Turkish membership in the EU since Cyprus was set to join the union in May 2004. Any major changes required the approval of the two communities that had been living separately on the island.
since 1974, as well as the acquiescence of the Turkish military which maintained troops on the island. Despite public declarations by some military officers, the AKP government supported a solution on the island and, along with the Turkish Cypriot government, advocated a vote of yes in the referendum on the Annan plan. However, the expected solution never materialized as a result of the rejection of the plan by the majority of Greek Cypriots in the April 2004 referendum.

EU candidacy, changing circumstances in Turkey’s region and new dynamics in Turkish-US relations necessitated reforms at home and in foreign policy. But, alterations of the external context in the neighbourhood and possible membership in the EU were interpreted by some sections of the military as threats to national and corporate interests. According to the alleged coup diaries of Admiral Özden Örnek, the critical event that led to the planning of the military interventions was ‘the positive turn in the negotiations for Turkish accession to the EU’. It was believed that the EU would provoke Kurdish separatism, ‘break-up the republic’ and ‘require Turkey to grant concessions on Cyprus’. The contemporary secretary general of the MGK, General Tuncer Kılıç, for example, argued in the summer of 2003 that the EU reforms ‘rendered the MGK functionless’, ‘would incite ethnic separatism’ and were ‘granting capitulations to foreigners’. Similar statements were made in 2003 and 2004 by the Land Forces Commander Aytaç Yalman, Commander of the Gendarmerie Şener Eruygur, Commander of the First Army Çetin Doğan and Commander of the Aegean Army Hurşit Tolon. Since it was believed that relations with the EU and the USA were damaging national interests, some members of the Turkish military also started to call for a fundamental shift in foreign policy away from the West. These ‘Euroasianist’ officers advocated getting out of NATO and searching for new alliances with Turkey’s eastern neighbours, such as Iran and Russia.

While the disposition to intervene erupted among hard-line officers in the late 1990s and early 2000s, prospects of EU membership and the changing international context led to a transformation in the attitudes of the general staff and moderate officers at around the same time. Even though the individuals in this camp are more difficult to delineate, Chief of the General Staff Özkoğ is usually considered as the leading figure of the moderates. However, as Demirel argues ‘it would not be a mistake to infer that Özkoğ was not alone and that the anti-coup inclination was echoed in the lower ranks of the hierarchical structure’. As the top ranking general of the armed forces, Özkoğ probably represented the beliefs of a considerable number of officers when he declared in August 2003 that: ‘from now on, we should have greater trust in the people. The [Turkish Armed Forces] should have a new vision’. As most observers of Turkish civil–military relations argue, in the early 2000s, Özkoğ and the Turkish general staff supported (or at least did not oppose) Turkish membership in the EU and the reforms that it required, including decreases in the tutelary powers and reserved domains of the military.

The acceptance of the reforms among the moderates can be explained by two factors, both indicating a changing calculation and an accompanying
transformation of attitude. First, the generals started to believe that the EU could help solve the economic and political problems that Turkey has faced. The EU was perceived as a mechanism that could tame rising Islamist activities and Kurdish separatism, and bring the dispute in Cyprus to a successful conclusion. In other words, ‘the costs of tackling these major problems alone seemed to surpass those of meeting European demands, even though compliance would inevitably transform the Turkish armed forces’.64

Second, the EU accession process created a situation in which the guardian and vanguard roles of the military contradicted each other. The overall outlook of the Turkish military emphasizes principles of national unity, sovereignty and secularism, but at the same time also stresses westernization, Europeanization and modernization as the ultimate aims of the Turkish nation.65 Even though in the past both missions of the armed forces could be carried out simultaneously, such a combination in a Turkey on the road to EU membership was not possible any more. Leading the country to EU membership (vanguard role) necessitated giving up some aspects of the guardian role.66 Any explicit turn away from the goal of westernization in order to protect the corporate interests of the military would oppose the raison d’État of the past coups and contradict the image that the military tried to portray.67 That is also why proposals to seek alliances other than the US and Europe were not an option for the general staff. Such a policy shift would eventually cause the armed forces to lose their credibility completely. Thus, as Demirel argues, the moderates in the military did not necessarily advocate the complete dissolution of the military’s autonomy and tutelary powers, but they believed that the reform process must be controlled as much as possible so that the armed forces would not lose all of their privileges.68

Transformation of the Turkish military and splits due to domestic dynamics

The transformation in the perspectives of the military hierarchy and the general staff was also due to changes in the relations between society and the armed forces. As in the southern European cases in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in Turkey as well, the popularity of possible EU membership until 2006, the electoral support of the government and changing public attitudes toward the military led to a shift within the armed forces. In the early 2000s, public posture toward military involvement in politics was negative, signalling that a coup would not be legitimate for the majority of society.69 This resulted in the re-assessment of the role of the military in politics by the moderates in the armed forces.

The AKP had won around 35% of the votes in the November 2002 elections and had received the mandate to form the new government. This was the largest amount of votes any party had received in general elections since 1987. From the early 1990s onwards, Turkey was governed by unstable coalition or minority governments. The formation of a single-party government gave the impression that there would be some sort of political stability at the executive level.70
Moreover, during the election campaign and after it came to power, the AKP government adopted a pro-EU stance and successfully tied the reform process to EU accession. In the early 2000s, public opinion surveys indicated that a clear majority of the people was in favour of Turkish accession to the EU. Aware of this support for the EU, Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök declared that ‘70 percent of the people want EU membership. Nobody can resist this kind of majority... we are ready to compromise and undertake risks to harmonize with the EU values’. Thus, the electoral success of the AKP and support for EU membership among the public led the general staff to reconsider its relations with society. It was clear for some of the generals that opposing the reform process and AKP rule would not be welcomed by the majority of the Turkish citizens.

More significantly than the prospect of EU membership, for considerable numbers of people in Turkey, the AKP government was received positively because of the economic stability that accompanied the party’s first term in office. Turkey had experienced a financial crisis during the coalition government in 2001. But the AKP came to power when the economy was picking up due to the measures that the previous government had taken against the crisis. In coordination with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the AKP government privatized inefficient state economic enterprises, and reduced and rationalized public spending. As a result of the stabilization programme, the rate of inflation decreased, exports increased, and foreign direct investment more than tripled in just one year. Given that Turkey had been ruled by coalition governments for around a decade, the economic and political stability of the AKP’s term in office was a breath of fresh air for the majority of the population and business community.

As public opinion supported the economic and political stability that the AKP brought, it also started to turn against military interventions in politics. Although this shift among the public and especially the elite began in the early 2000s, it became more evident especially with the April 2007 presidential crisis. The AKP nominated Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül to the presidency to replace President Ahmet Necdet Sezer when his term concluded. This move resulted in the fear that the AKP would capture both the parliament and the presidency. The general staff reacted to this possibility and implied in an announcement from its website that the military would take action to prevent such an outcome. Spurred by the crisis of presidential elections, several demonstrations and rallies were held against the AKP. Thousands of people poured out onto the streets in several cities in order to show their opposition. The numbers reached 1,000,000 in Istanbul and 370,000 in Ankara. These rallies demonstrated that the AKP was perceived as a threat to the secular principles of the Republic among some segments of society. However, it was also possible to observe in the rallies the common outcry that a coup would not solve the problem, but make things even worse. It became publicly clear that a coup would be opposed even by staunch secularists that shared the military’s sensitivity on the visibility of Islam in politics.

The AKP government also responded to the declaration fiercely, opposed the military’s move and ‘issued a counter-statement reminding the [military] that the
The AKP government was the civilian authority and that, in democracies, it is not acceptable for the armed forces to intervene in politics.\textsuperscript{76} The AKP decided to overcome the crisis by holding early elections, and at this stage, the website declaration of the military played into the hands of the AKP. The party ran a campaign stressing democracy and won 47% of the votes.\textsuperscript{77} Shortly after the elections, the new AKP-dominated parliament elected Gül as the 11th president of the Turkish Republic. Confronted by the AKP’s determination to thwart the military and the reaction of the electorate at the ballot box, the generals backed down and failed to carry out the threats of the website declaration.

The public protests and election result of 2007 revealed what was already apparent for some observers of Turkish politics: society’s perceptions of the military’s role in politics had shifted.\textsuperscript{78} As Aydınlı notes, EU candidacy, in combination with ‘relative political stability and strong political leadership’, led to a reassessment of the military’s involvement in politics among people with quite diverse ideological backgrounds, representing intellectuals, media, civil society groups and the business community.\textsuperscript{79} A survey of parliamentary debates on military budgets and national security between 2002 and 2007 also reveals that for an increasing number of deputies the formal and informal roles of the armed forces in politics had become unacceptable.\textsuperscript{80} Even political parties in opposition that are traditionally more in concert with the military, such as the National Action Party (MHP) and the Republican People’s Party (CHP), started to criticize the armed forces.\textsuperscript{81} Analysing the attitudes of parliamentarians and the media, Narlı concludes that by 2007 the security culture in Turkey had transformed significantly and ‘the new political culture is not very friendly with the idea of a coup’.\textsuperscript{82}

As in southern European cases, in Turkey as well, while some officers accepted and adjusted to this new culture and relations with society, some hard-line military officers viewed these changes with contempt. At the core of the problem also lay the belief among the hardliners that the AKP had Islamist tendencies. From their point of view, the reforms and changes in public perceptions were taking place under the rule of a dangerously anti-secular party. In the words of Cizre and Walker, a segment of the high command ‘regards the ruling party’s project of inserting itself into the EU fold as a ruse, intended to disguise its Islamist agenda’.\textsuperscript{83} The relative success and sustainability of the AKP rule at the beginning of its first term in office intensified the divergence of opinion in the military. The non-interventionist stance of the general staff toward the AKP government and its reforms were interpreted by the hard-liners as leniencies and sanctioning of religious activities.\textsuperscript{84}

For officers in both camps of the military, the ultimate aim remained probably the same, that is, protecting military and national interests. However, the two sides had different opinions on how to pursue the same goal.\textsuperscript{85} In the end, the stance of the general staff had important consequences for the military officers who had a different interpretation of the events. It intensified the disposition to intervene for pro-coup officers, who started to believe that the intervention should also oust the chief of general staff and his allies in the armed forces.\textsuperscript{86} By 2007,
however, the AKP was strengthened by the presidential crisis and the election results. As a result, it could show more resolve in thwarting the efforts of the hardliners. Faced with an unfavourable political context and public attitude toward the role of the military in politics, the faith of pro-coup officers was sealed and their opportunity for staging a successful intervention was closed.

The Ergenekon investigation started shortly after the website declaration of the general staff, in June 2007. The investigation is still an ongoing process. In the past four years, 18 operations were conducted, 318 individuals were formally charged and 15 indictments were prepared. As of summer 2011, the court cases have not been concluded yet, therefore none of the accused individuals have been convicted even though some of them are still kept in prison. Moreover, some of the suspects have been detained without being formally charged. In January 2010, a separate investigation on the alleged Balyoz coup plan began, following a set of documents that the Taraf daily published. In July 2010, 196 military officers were sued for attempting to overthrow the government. More arrests have taken place since the summer of 2010 and at the time of writing, similar to the Ergenekon case, the Balyoz investigation has not been concluded either.

The long duration of the investigations and the trials, as well as the number of individuals alleged with the crime of staging a coup has been criticized both at home and abroad. Several journalists critical of the AKP government have been implicated in the coup plans, apart from military officers, civil society activists and others. The arrests of the journalists have especially led to the accusation that the cases are not an attempt to clean out the pro-coup elements within the state and the military, but a convenient tool for the AKP government and its sympathizers to repress the opposition, pressure the media and disgrace and trap the secular military. Besides these controversies, the investigations are important turning points in Turkish history since retired and active officers are being charged with anti-democratic activities for the first time. There is no doubt that the exposure of the coup plots will have significant consequences for Turkish democracy.

Consequences of the exposed coup plots

In southern Europe, failed coup attempts facilitated the consolidation of liberal democracy by two interrelated mechanisms: first they helped strengthen civilian control over the military by legal amendments, and second, they expedited attitudinal support for democracy among politically significant civilian groups and within the military. In Turkey, the exposure of the coup plots produced similar results in the first mechanism by providing an impetus to legal reforms in civil–military relations. The AKP was strengthened by the 2007 election results, the military’s decision not to intervene against Gül’s presidency again, and by the trials of suspected officers after 2008. Consequently, it rolled up its sleeves to introduce more reforms in civil–military relations and eliminate some more areas of military autonomy.
In January 2010, the government abolished the Police-Public Security Cooperation (EMASYA) protocol, which had formed one of the legal bases for the military to carry out internal security operations. Later in the year, the government prepared a constitutional package, which was approved by the majority of the electorate in a referendum on 12 September. The package included the following changes: armed forces personnel would be adjudicated in civilian courts for non-military offences; it would be possible to try the generals who had staged the military intervention of 1980; and the decisions of the High Military Council on purges from the military would be subjected to judicial review. Accompanying these legal changes, civilians’ willingness to challenge military autonomy in practice has also increased. In August 2010, for the first time in more than two decades, the AKP government got involved in the decisions of the High Military Council regarding promotions. It is possible that in the near future civilian control over the armed forces will further increase in practice and more reforms will be introduced.

Despite the reforms, the question remains: will democracy be consolidated in Turkey? There is no simple answer to this question since, as Turan nicely put it, ‘less military may not mean more democracy’ in Turkey. Even though there is now an emerging consensus against the role of the military in politics, the same type of accord on democracy does not exist among political parties, especially regarding their perceptions of each other. According to some political groups, and most notably the main opposition Republican People’s Party, the AKP has roots in parties that were closed down by the Constitutional Court because of their anti-secular activities. Some of the leaders of the AKP had been previously active in these banned political formations. This prior record concerns secularists in Turkey, who fear that the AKP uses a liberal discourse and participates in the elections only as a means to an anti-democratic end, namely to turn Turkey into an Islamic republic. These opposition groups suspect that the AKP is infiltrating the state and has taken over the police forces in order to execute its religious agenda. The reforms that the AKP implemented after 2002 have raised considerable doubts about the true intentions of the party in carrying out these constitutional changes. The opposition believes that the discourse of democracy has provided a safe cover and concealed the real motivations of the AKP government.

The groups that perceive the AKP as dangerous for Turkey’s secular state do not necessarily support the continued influence of the military in politics. On the contrary, they are mostly against military interventions and in principle support the reforms in civil–military relations. However, they suspect that the reforms and the exposed plots are used as a suitable instrument to weaken the military in order to advance an Islamist agenda. The manner in which the investigations of the plots have been proceeding does not help alleviate concerns. Suspected individuals have been kept in custody for days without any formal charges, prominent individuals with severe health problems have been detained under unacceptable conditions, and well-known journalists and civil society activists (some of them quite outspoken in their opposition to coups) have been accused of being part of
a clandestine organization. Most of those who have been implicated, including civilians, have been tied together as members of a terrorist organization. The accused individuals seem to be from such diverse backgrounds that some observers have argued the only common element that brings them together is their opposition to the AKP and the party is using the case to repress and intimidate its opponents.94

Some of the alleged crimes sound absurd to outside observers. The suspects are claimed to have planned false flag operations, such as attacking religious minority groups, planting explosives in mosques, assassinating prominent secular individuals or bombing secular left-wing newspapers, in order to incite chaos and opposition against the AKP. Even though 15 indictments were written as of summer 2011, and the first three ran to thousands of pages, the official accusations for the Ergenekon case produced uncertain evidence. The Balyoz suit raised similar doubts about the impartiality of the prosecutors as well. It appears that the courts are divided into two factions too. The judiciary in Turkey has been seen as another bastion of the secular republic; therefore such accusations lead to perceptions of threat that the AKP has also succeeded in infiltrating one more state institution and politicizing it.

In southern Europe, the transformation of military attitudes was completed with failed coups that helped identify and clean out hardliners and that led to feelings of shame among neutral officers. But such an important change was made possible by a consensus in society, where widespread attitudinal and behavioural support for democracy led to mutual trust, respect and feelings of security in the late 1980s. In contrast with the experience of Greece, Portugal and Spain, Turkish politics today is characterized by a vicious circle. Political actors, represented mostly by the Republican People’s Party and its electoral supporters, accuse the AKP of not being loyal to democracy and supporting the regime as long as it serves the interests of the party. The AKP, on the other hand, charges the opposition with the same felony of not being truly democratic. The AKP blames its opponents for not recognizing the party’s electoral success and undermining the liberal reforms. Such a political context of mutual accusations and suspicions is not conducive to democratic consolidation. Rather than help bring political actors together, the alleged coups actually intensified polarization in Turkey. It is true that neither of the groups advocates a military coup any longer, and the transformation of the general staff is unlikely to be reversed completely. But the role of the military in politics and the failed coup plots are at the centre of polarization in Turkish politics.

Conclusion

This article attempted to identify the conditions under which further democratization can be achieved in Turkey. Civilian control over the armed forces and attitudinal support for the regime among military officers are necessary conditions for democratic consolidation in Turkey. The literature on civil–military relations point to changes in the international context, membership in international organizations and civilian consensus against military interventions as facilitating factors
that lead to a transformation in the attitudes of the officers. Failed coup attempts, like in Spain, and the humiliating experience of an unpopular military regime, like in Greece, can also help eliminate remaining hard-liners in the military and pave the way for consolidation. Coup attempts fail especially when there are no opportunities for an intervention, that is, when there are no major crises that lead to a pro-coup climate among the public.

In Turkey, the transformation of the military started in the late 1990s with EU candidacy, and reforms that membership would require in domestic politics. The end of the Cold War, the war in Iraq and a possible solution to the conflict in Cyprus led to a reassessment of Turkish foreign- and security-policy concerns. Domestically, the electoral support for the AKP, economic growth and a shift in public opinion against military interventions also resulted in the reconsideration of the armed forces’ relations with society. In the early 2000s, the general staff supported Turkey’s EU bid and did not stand in the way of reforms in civil–military relations, minority rights and foreign policy. The attitude of some of the generals toward the AKP, however, was not shared by hard-line officers who planned to stage coups. Closed opportunities led to the exposure of coup plots and, ironically, hastened and cemented the reform process in civil–military relations that the conspirators attempted to prevent.

Civilian control of the armed forces and eradicating their political autonomy, tutelary powers and reserved domains are necessary for democracy. The importance of this point cannot be minimized, and most certainly the exposure of coup plots and changing civil–military relations can be perceived as positive democratic developments. Yet this is hardly enough. Attitudinal and behavioural support for democracy among all significant actors is also a necessary condition for further democratization. Perhaps more importantly for Turkey, all groups must mutually trust each other and believe that democracy is the ‘only game in town’ for everybody else as well.

Turkey is currently far from achieving these conditions of democracy and the prospects for consolidation in the short run look bleak given the vicious circle in which the political parties are caught. Opposition groups maintain that their anti-AKP position is necessary in order to save the republic, without which the regime would not be able to function. From this point of view, there is now no EU anchor to guide Turkish democratization. Since the 2006 decision of the EU to suspend eight chapters of the acquis that would lead to Turkish membership, there is no external actor to prevent the authoritarian tendencies of the AKP government. Indeed, despite the reforms, Turkey still faces important obstacles in fulfilling the other important elements of a liberal democracy, including freedom of expression, minority rights and free access to information from the press and the internet. Thus, for important elements in Turkish society, the AKP purposefully selects the areas in which it wants to further democratization for its own self-interest (such as reforms in civil–military relations) but shows signs of increasing authoritarianism in other areas (such as limited changes in the conditions of Kurdish rights or rising pressure over the media).
Thus, even though the AKP argues that it is strengthening democracy, opposition groups believe otherwise. When both sides accuse each other of not being democratic, however, it is in the end Turkish democracy that suffers. More than the possibility of another military coup or the return of authoritarianism, perhaps the most immediate danger Turkey faces now is increasing polarization. As long as mutual attacks and charges continue, the liberal centre and democracy in Turkey will be hollowed out. This is a real possibility that unfortunately overshadows the recent developments in civil–military relations.

Notes
1. “‘2004’ te İkı Darbe Atlatmışız’.
2. For a critical assessment of the number of generals and admirals under arrest, see İnce, ‘Bu Nasıl Darbeci Ordusu?’.
3. The April 2009 testimony of the former Chief of General Staff Hilmi Özkök that during his term in office he was informed about possible coup plans added plausibility to the existence of extra-hierarchical plots in the military during the early 2000s. See ‘Delil Yoktu’.
4. For a comparison of democratization in Turkey, Portugal and Spain, see Yılmaz, ‘External-Internal Linkages in Democratization’.
6. For the distinction between electoral and liberal democracies, see Diamond, Developing Democracy, 8–13.
7. On the conceptualization of civilian control of the military and its significance for democracy, see Croissant et al., ‘Beyond the Fallacy’.
13. Following Guillermo O’Donnell’s model, Özbudun defines the regime in Turkey as a ‘delegative democracy’, which refers to a democracy that is relatively stable but not consolidated. For an overview of problems with democratic consolidation in Turkey, see Özbudun, Contemporary Turkish Politics, 149–54.
14. Tutelary powers grant the military the authority to ‘exercise broad oversight of the government and its policy decisions’. Reserved domains refer to specific policy areas that the government cannot make decisions in and control because of an explicit or implicit threat of a military intervention. Valenzuela, ‘Democratic Consolidation’, 62–5.
17. For an overview of this debate, see Feaver, ‘The Civil–Military Problematique’.
18. Also see Welch, ‘Two Strategies of Civilian Control’.
27. Table 7.1 in Morlino and Montero, ‘Legitimacy and Democracy’, 236. Also see Danopoulos, ‘Democratizing the Military’, 32–3.
28. For a concise analysis of the rise of General Franco’s regime in Spain, see Mann, Fascists, 297–352.
30. For the opposition of the elites to the 1981 coup in Spain, see Gunther, Spain, 74–6; for the moderation of political parties and the evolution of PASOK in Greece, see Linz, Stepan, and Gunther, ‘Democratic Transition and Consolidation’, 112–5.
34. Gürsoy, ‘Civilian Support and Military Unity’.
36. Ibid., 163; Veremis, The Military, 173.
37. For an overview of the military’s role in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, see Hale, Turkish Politics and the Military, 35–58. For a similar argument on the historical antecedents of the military’s central role in Turkish politics, see Demirel, 2000’li Yıllarda Asker, 4.
38. Quoted in Hale, Turkish Politics and the Military, 80.
39. Ibid., 80–1.
40. For more on the interventions between 1950 and 1980 see Ibid., 88–275.
42. On the institutional mechanisms that provided the military political autonomy after the 1980 coup, see Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, ‘The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’, 151–66.
45. Şatana, ‘Transformation of the Turkish Military’. Also see Park, ‘Defence Transformation’.
47. Ibid., 382.
48. Although EU candidacy gave major impetus to the legal amendments, there was domestic pressure for the reforms as well. See Ulusoy, ‘Turkey’s Reform Efforts Reconsidered’, 472–90.
The amendments in civil–military relations due to the EU accession process have been documented well in the literature. For examples, see Akay, ‘Avrupa Birliği’; Cizre, ‘The Justice and Development Party and the Military’; Michaud-Emin, ‘The Restructuring of the Military High Command’; Ünlü Bilgiç, ‘The Military and Europeanization Reforms’.


Müftüler Başç and Gürsoy, ‘Is There a Europeanization of Turkish Foreign Policy?’.


Cizre and Walker, ‘Conceiving the New Turkey after Ergenekon’, 94. See also Heper, ‘The European Union, the Turkish Military and Democracy’ on the difference of opinion in the military with regard to the EU.

Quoted in Heper, ‘The European Union, the Turkish Military and Democracy’, 38.

These officers were later implicated in the exposed coup conspiracies, although they seem to have different mindsets and types of involvement in the plots.


Demirel, 2000’li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset, 17. According to several scholars, the chiefs of staff who followed Özkök, Yaşar Büyükant and Ilker Başbuğ, resembled him in their progressive and moderate attitudes. See Aydınlı, ‘A Paradigmatic Shift’, 591–4 and Heper, ‘The Justice and Development Party Government and the Military’, 227. Even though this general conclusion holds true, the attitude of Büyükant has been more controversial due to the 2007 website declaration of the general staff during the presidential crisis (see footnote 75 below).

Quoted in Heper, ‘The European Union, the Turkish Military and Democracy’, 41.


For the changing stance of the Chief of Staff İlker Başbuğ on the Kurdish and Cyprus problems, see Demirel, 2000’li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset, 20.

Aydınlı, Özcan, and Akyaz, ‘The Turkish Military’s March toward Europe’, 87.


Sarıgil, ‘Europeanization as Institutional Change’, 48. Also see Aydınlı, Özcan, and Akyaz, ‘The Turkish Military’s March toward Europe’, 77–90.

Demirel, 2000’li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset, 19. Ünlü Bilgiç argues that, in fact, the military was able to control the reform process quite successfully. See her article entitled ‘The Military and Europeanization Reforms in Turkey’.

There is no public opinion survey that can outline societal attitudes toward the military in Turkey in a comprehensive manner. In more general surveys, the military always comes off as the most trusted institution; however, it should be kept in mind that this question does not necessarily measure support for military interventions. In fact, in a 2005 Eurobarometer survey that excluded the military, the most trusted institution was the government. In another survey in 2006, respondents were specifically asked whether or not they approved of military interventions in politics and while 58% said that they did not, only 14.5% did approve of them. See ‘İçinde Ordu Olmayan Soru’ and ‘Anket’, also quoted respectively in Aydınlı, ‘A Paradigmatic Shift’, 587; and Narlı, ‘EU Harmonisation Reforms’, 446.
The number of people who support EU membership in Turkey declined significantly after 2006 partially because of the EU’s decision to freeze eight of the 35 negotiation chapters. However, the transformation of the military, the split in the armed forces and the alleged coup plots took place in the early 2000s, when public opinion toward the EU was quite positive. Therefore, the decline of support for EU membership after 2006 is beyond the scope of this article. For a complete assessment of public opinion towards the EU since 1996, see Çarkoğlu and Kalayçıoğlu, *The Rising Tide*, 122–9.

There is considerable controversy over the reasons behind this website pronouncement of the military. It has been variously suggested that the Chief of Staff Yaşar Büyükântı attempted to put down a possible coup among hard-line junior officers, that he was not the one who actually authored the declaration or that he knew that this declaration would eventually benefit the AKP and increase its popularity. Even though the latter two lines of reasoning were refuted by Büyükântı himself, both explanations are in concert with the belief that Büyükântı was a moderate, similar to his predecessor Özkök. Amidst existing speculations, we still do not have enough information to truly assess the reasons for the declaration and why a moderate (if this is in fact a correct assumption) adopted such a contradictory move and threatened the government with a coup. For an assessment of the declaration, see Kılıç, ‘Erdogâan-Büyükântı Niye Konuşmaz?’, for Büyükântı’s own interpretation of the events, see ‘Dolmabahçe Görüşmesini İlk Kez Anlatı’.

For an overview of this change in public perceptions, see Demirel, *2000’li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset*, 8–10.

For such a view, see Çağaptay, ‘What’s Really behind Turkey’s Coup Arrests?’ and Çağaptay, ‘Behind Turkey’s Witch Hunt’. Çağaptay agrees with the view held by some factions of Turkish society that the AKP is supported by an Islamic order led
by Fettullah Gülen. According to this point of view the Gülen movement controls the police and important elements of the judiciary and bureaucracy. Together with the AKP, these groups are behind the allegations of coup plots in order to intimidate the secular military and the opposition.


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Civil-Military Relations During the AK Party Era: Major Developments and Challenges

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Abstract
The remarkable transformation of Turkish civil-military relations since the AK Party’s rise to power has not led to total democratization in this area. Although EU reforms reduced the military’s formal and informal powers and trials about contemporary and historic coup cases might indicate that the military has been subordinated to civilian authority, achieving democratic civil-military relations would require a balance of power between civilians and the military: While the military must relinquish its role as the country’s guardians, civilians must work to regain the trust of military officers that they lost through the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases. Perhaps then Turkish civil-military relations can reach a democratic level, promoting democratic consolidation in the country.

The dominant role of the Turkish military in politics has constituted one of the significant obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. The Turkish military has controlled politics since the establishment of the Republic in 1923 and more strongly starting in the 1960s through direct and indirect military interventions and the prerogatives received following various coups. The Turkish military sees itself as the guardian of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s reforms and principles, particularly secularism and nationalism, and has not refrained from intervening politically whenever it perceived that these values were in danger. Recently, however, the Turkish Armed Forces has slowly but significantly been losing this power. Since the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AK Party) took power in November 2002, there has been a dramatic shift in the balance of power at the expense of the military, establishing a more civilian dominated system. However, the progress in achieving civilian control has not yet transformed Turkish civil-military relations into a genuinely democratic model.

According to Diamond et al, the factors promoting the consolidation of democracy include political institutions, civil society, socio-economic develop-
The dominant role of the Turkish military in politics has constituted one of the significant obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey

Meanwhile, military officers and secularist circles do not trust civilians, particularly the judiciary, as a result of the allegations of unfair treatment of military members in the recently concluded Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledgehammer) trials. Consequently, such uneasy relations do not promote the transformation of Turkish civil-military relations into a democratic model, thus hindering Turkey’s democratic consolidation process.

Since coming to power in 2002, AK Party governments have aimed to decrease the military’s power in politics through legal and institutional changes. First, the EU-mandated reforms pursued by the AK Party government caused the military to lose its formal (institutional) mechanisms, such as the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Konseyi—MGK). Second, as a result of the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials that cost the military officers their credibility due to charges of plotting a coup against the government, the military lost various informal (non-institutional) mechanisms, such as public speeches and press conferences, through which the senior military members had previously intervened in politics.

Third, the consolidation of the AK Party’s political power and the desecuritization policies it followed until recently also reduced the military’s significant role in dealing with internal threats, such as the rise of Kurdish nationalism in the form of PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - Kurdish Workers Party) terror, and international threats particularly with neighboring Middle Eastern states. The decrease in PKK attacks in the early years of the government also helped this desecuritization policy. Moreover, the new political atmosphere, in which a strong ruling party had consolidated its power by increasing its support in three consecutive elections, meant that the military could not retain the power it possessed throughout the 1970s and 1990s when the weakness of civilian politicians and parties generated a vacuum of authority. Finally, the military...
recently lost more of its institutional power, mainly through the 2010 Constitutional amendments that limited the jurisdiction of military courts, abolished the military’s right to conduct internal security operations without the consent of civilian authorities and increased civilian oversight of military expenditures. In addition, the government recently amended Article 35 of the Internal Service Law that gave the armed forces the right to intervene in the face of internal threats.

To analyze these major developments and challenges in civil-military relations during the AK Party era, this article will start with a brief overview of the military’s role in Turkish politics by focusing on the institutional mechanisms through which it exerted power into politics since the 1960s. It will then concentrate on civil-military relations in two periods during AK Party’s rule.5

First, this article will examine how the cautious policies that the military and government initially followed towards each other between 2002 and 2007 turned from a controlled power struggle to an open conflict. It will consider the EU reforms aimed at curbing the military’s formal power in politics, before concentrating on the military’s interference in domestic and foreign policies through informal mechanisms, particularly speeches by senior military officers. This section will end by describing the open conflict between the two sides during the presidential elections of 2007. For the second period, from 2007 until 2013, the article will mainly focus on the reasons for the dramatic decrease in the military’s political power and its subordination to civilian control. It will first analyze the Ergenekon and Balyoz coup investigations and trials, as well as the investigations of the 1980 and 1997 coups, before discussing the consolidation of the AK Party’s political power. Finally, it will consider further institutional powers that were stripped from the military during this period. The article will conclude with a discussion of whether or not this shift in civil military relations in Turkey represents a move towards a democratic model by mainly concentrating on the mindset of military officers who are unwilling to accept the professional culture of civilian supremacy and the members of the military, secularist circles, part of media and civil society organizations who are disturbed by the judicial system’s handling of the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials.

An Overview of Turkish Civil-Military Relations prior to the 2000s

The Turkish military, having contributed to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, accepted itself as the protector of the principles and reforms of the young republic set by its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Consequently, it has intervened in politics whenever it has perceived threats to these principles, particularly secularism and nationalism, or to general law and order.6
Guarded the Turkish state’s national interests against all kinds of internal and external threats.

Although civilians seemed to have direct political control in the early years of the Republic, it cannot be considered as full civilian control since the ruling elite, most significantly Atatürk and İsmet İnönü, were former military officers who became politicians after establishing the Republic. The military first intervened politically in 1960, both directly and indirectly, when the Democratic Party government resorted to an authoritarian style of rule. It did so again in 1971 and 1980 when the country was dragged into chaos by struggles between extreme rightist and leftist groups. Although considerable civilian influence over military was established during the Prime Ministry and Presidency of Turgut Özal in late 1980s and early 1990s, the Turkish military’s interference into politics increased dramatically throughout most of the 1990s as a result of the rise of PKK’s separatist terror and fragile coalition governments. The military also intervened in 1997, when the Islamist conservative Welfare Party (Refah Partisi—RP) was in power and seemed to be following what the military called Islamist fundamentalist policies. While the PKK was a threat to the territorial integrity of the country for the military, Islamist fundamentalism was a danger for the secular foundation of the Republic. In the 1960 and 1980 coups, the military intervened directly by overthrowing the government, banning various political parties and political leaders from politics and establishing its own junta government under martial law. That is, the military took power directly into its own hands. By contrast, the military intervened indirectly in 1971 and 1997 by pressuring the elected governments to resign through threats of coups rather than directly establishing a military administration, which left the ruling of the country to those political parties and leaders that the military favored. In the 1997 coup, for example, the military followed a method of attrition to remove the RP from power by cooperating with labor organizations, the judiciary, universities, the media and other civil society organizations. The military believed that by intervening in politics, it was helping to sustain democracy by keeping the excesses of rightist, leftist and Islamist politicians under control. This was a period in which there was complete military supremacy over civilian politics.

In the aftermath of each intervention, the military increased its political power by according itself significant prerogatives. These privileges were mainly implemented in the form of important institutions, such as the National Security Council (Milli Güvenlik Konseyi—MGK), the State Security Courts, and various departments, groups and centers established by the General Staff. The MGK, which was established as a council for the military to submit its views on national security to civilian politicians, quickly turned into a formal platform for military members to dictate their wishes to politicians, forcing the Council of Ministers to give priority to the MGK’s decisions. The State Security
Courts, where military judges were involved in civilian trials, dealt with political crimes such as terrorism, separatism and activities against the Republic. The military also set up its own departments, groups and centers to collect information concerning domestic and foreign policies. Some of the most significant among these were the Western Working Group (Batı Çalışma Grubu) to fight the rise of political Islam, the Eastern Working Group (Doğu Çalışma Grubu) to cope with the rise of Kurdish nationalism, and the Prime-Ministerial Crisis Management Center (Başbakanlık Kriz Yönetim Merkezi) to observe and report on crises due to Islamic reactionaryism.9

Through these mechanisms the Turkish military managed to remain as a significant political actor as an equal partner with the popularly elected political parties and leaders. As stated by Sarıgil, the Turkish military was a popular praetorian military, which was involved in civilian politics by acting as the guardian of the state. It intervened in politics in an attempt to resolve the political disputes rather than establishing a military regime. Moreover, it was integrated into society and enjoyed popular support and legitimacy.10

Civil-Military Relations during the AK Party Era: Major Developments

In the aftermath of the coup on February 28th, 1997, the military warned and then forced the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi – RP) out of the coalition government with the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi – DYP) over policies that were perceived as anti-secular by the armed forces. This forced resignation led to the establishment of the AK Party. In spite of their strong Islamist origins, the more moderate-looking and younger politicians that came from the youth organizations of the RP differed from the RP’s old guard in supporting secularism, adopting neo-liberal economic policies and aiming to make Turkey a full member of the EU. The AK Party’s first national electoral victory (with 34.4% of the vote) in November 2002 was met with apprehension by the Turkish Armed Forces, despite the party’s repeated declarations of its commitment to secularism. The military’s uneasiness with the party’s achievements increased further as the party’s share of the vote rose from 47.6% in the 2007 elections to 49.8% in 2011. The armed forces’ agitation eventually provoked several plans to overthrow the government by creating a chaotic atmosphere in order to justify a military coup. These plots ultimately led to the investigations, long trials and finally imprisonment of hundreds of active-duty and retired military officers.
in the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials. The following section will examine AK Party’s relations with the military during two distinct periods.

The First Period: From Controlled Power Struggle to Open Conflict (2002-2007)

Once the AK Party came to power in November 2002, both the military and the government followed cautious policies towards each other. Although the military refrained from criticizing the government at first, it was later unable to restrain from voicing its disapproval of various AK Party policies. The military then used speeches given by its senior members to intervene in the government’s policies. The AK Party’s ruling elite tried to build a consensus with the military by avoiding Islamist policies and calling themselves a conservative rather than religious party. Moreover, they remodeled the party’s image and ideological agenda in a pro-western direction with neo-liberal economic policies and democratic reforms to qualify Turkey for full EU membership.11

The then Chief of General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, while warning the government on sensitive issues, such as secularism and territorial integrity, at the same time followed a conciliatory approach towards the government. In a speech right after the elections, he stated that he respected the results of the democratic process that reflected the choice of the people. While he declared in a speech a few days later that the military was ready to protect the country against any kind of threat, including Islamist fundamentalism and separatism, he also stated in private meetings with military commanders that as long as AK Party did not violate secularism, the military was not going to move against it.12 Although both the AK Party ruling elite and the military actually wanted to join the Gulf War of 2003 in Iraq, siding with the USA, the parliament voted against such action, the military did not intervene.

Unlike its predecessor the RP, as soon as the AK Party came to power, it aimed to make Turkey a full EU member. In particular, in order to meet the political conditions of the Copenhagen criteria, it aimed to democratize civil-military relations. To this end, through harmonization packages and constitutional amendments in the early 2000s, the AK Party government decreased the military’s institutional power by first curbing the strength of the MGK by reducing it to the level of an advisory body. To do so, it created a majority of civilian members in the MGK, reduced the frequency of its meetings, civilianized its secretariat, abolished the Secretary General’s extensive and supervisory powers, repealed the Council’s access to civilian agencies and placed its budget under the control of the Prime Ministry. Moreover, military representatives were removed from the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the High Audio Visual Board (RTÜK). The abolition of the State Security Courts reduced the military’s power to try civilians in military courts. In order to diminish the autonomy of the military in financial transactions, the power of the Parliament and the Court of Audit to supervise the military budget and state properties owned by the armed
forces was increased. While passing these new bills, the government bypassed the MGK and sent the draft laws directly to the parliament to reduce the influence of military in such matters. At the same time, the military, which had always defined itself as the forerunner of westernization, did not oppose Turkey’s EU membership bid or the reforms being implemented to qualify Turkey to join the Union, as long as they did not violate Atatürk’s principles of secularism and nationalism as reflected in the indivisibility of Turkish territory.

Seeing the curtailment of their formal (institutional) mechanisms to exert political power through EU reforms, senior members of the military who resisted these reforms resorted to informal (non-institutional) mechanisms of power, such as speeches, press statements and declarations, to exercise political influence over domestic and foreign policy issues, including secularism, the Kurdish question and Cyprus. For example, through their speeches at commemorations, anniversaries and graduation ceremonies at military academies, the senior members of the military thwarted a number of AK Party policies. These included the reform of the higher education law to make it easier for graduates of vocational religious schools (İmam Hatip Okulları) to enter universities in fall 2003, the wearing of headscarves in public spaces throughout 2003, and the improvement of relations with the Gülen Schools and the National View movement (Milli Görüş) through diplomats in Turkish embassies in Europe in spring 2003. Upon the remilitarization of the PKK after ending its five-year unilateral ceasefire in June 2004, the military pushed the AK Party to take a harsher stance on terrorism, resulting in the establishment of a new anti-terror law in fall 2006. This new law changed the definition of many terrorist and
terrorism-related offences and introduced new investigative measures regarding the prosecution of suspected terrorists. Along the same line, the Office of the General Staff interfered into the trial of non-commissioner officers who were charged with Şemdinli bombings. The rise of PKK terror during this period created a new sphere of influence for the armed forces.

Concerning foreign policy, towards the end of 2002 and early 2003, the military made various statements opposing the government’s decision to support Secretary General Kofi Annan’s plan for restructuring Cyprus as the United Republic of Cyprus, consisting of a federation of two states. However, in January 2004, the military also accepted the Annan Plan when the leadership in Cyprus changed. Another initiative that the military blocked was the government’s attempt to start direct negotiations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Northern Iraq in 2007. The government stepped back once the military, particularly the new Chief of General Staff, Yaşar Büyükanıt, indicated their opposition to such negotiations on the grounds that the KRG was the main force accommodating several thousand PKK militants. Similarly, although the government delayed starting a cross-border operation into Northern Iraq to counter increasing attacks of the PKK from this region, the military finally forced the government to initiate the operation. First, in October 2007, a government motion to approve cross-border military operations in the fight against the PKK was accepted in the parliament. Second, in November 2007, Prime Minister Erdoğan paid a visit to American President George W. Bush to receive a green light for the operation and the operation was realized in February 2008.

These domestic and foreign political interventions by the military transformed the power struggle between the AK Party and the army into an open conflict. Having received 46.7% of the votes in the July 2007 general elections, the AK Party felt much stronger and more secure about controlling politics and placing pressure on the military. One of the main reasons for the conflict between the two sides was the AK Party’s loss of enthusiasm for EU reforms following the inception of the open accession negotiations on October 3, 2005. European concerns over Turkish membership led to the rise of Euroskepticism in Turkey. These developments provided space for the military to act against the AK Party government that had curbed its formal power through EU reforms. Another important reason for the confrontation was the replacement of a moderate Chief of General Staff, Hilmi Özkök, with the strongly nationalist and pro-secularist General Yaşar Büyükanıt. Unlike General Özkök, who preferred to keep quiet about everyday politics, General Büyükanıt involved himself by giving speeches concerning anti-secular and separatist activities.
The most important conflict between the AK Party and the military occurred when the government made a prominent party member, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Gül, their candidate for the 2007 Presidential Election. Unhappy with this decision but stripped of the formal mechanisms it previously used to intervene politically, the military resorted to informal mechanisms through a memorandum published on the military’s website by Büyükanıt on April 27, 2007, stating his worries about the alleged weakening of secularism in Turkey. He stated that the military opposed the candidacy of both Prime Minister Erdoğan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Gül. The response of the AK Party’s ruling elite was harsh, declaring that the Office of the Chief of General Staff was constitutionally answerable to the Prime Minister. In the end, after its victory in the July 2007 elections, the AK Party was able to have Gül elected to the presidency without difficulty. The military’s so-called April 27th e-memorandum marked a turning point in Turkish civil-military relations because from then on, relations moved in favor of the civilians at the expense of the military, subordinating the military to civilian orders.

Following the e-memorandum episode in April 2007 and the victory of the AK Party in the June 2007 elections, the military moved into a period of quiet protest rather than open conflict with the AK Party government. The dramatic decrease in the military’s power in both domestic and foreign politics and its subordination to civilians was the result of various factors. The first and most significant were the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, in which hundreds of junior and senior military officers were found guilty and imprisoned for planning to create chaos in Turkey in order to justify a military coup against the AK Party government. In addition to these trials, the military also started to lose credibility as a result of investigations and trials into the 1980 and 1997 coups that exposed various human rights violations.

Second, the AK Party’s consolidation of political power following its 2007 and 2011 electoral successes, with 46.7% and 49.8% of the votes respectively, gave the party more leeway to challenge the military and exercise full authority in domestic and international issues. Moreover, this strengthening enabled the party to pursue “desecuritization policies” for a certain period. That is, it permitted the party to transfer certain sensitive issues from the realm of security into the political realm. Third, the military’s loss of other institutional powers through additional constitutional amendments forced it to keep quiet over various political issues.

The Turkish military received a huge blow with the parallel court cases of Balyoz and Ergenekon, which ended in September 2012 and August 2013 respectively. In these trials, dozens of military officers, including a former Chief of General Staff and former army commanders, as well as journalists, academics,
businessmen, ultra-nationalists and representatives of civil society organizations, were sentenced to lengthy prison terms for attempting to plan coups to overthrow the government. The Ergenekon investigation, which can be considered the most important legal battle in recent Turkish history, started in June 2007 with the discovery of 27 hand grenades in a shanty house in Istanbul that belonged to a retired non-commissioned officer. These discoveries led to the arrest of 200 journalists, writers, military personnel, gang leaders, scholars and businessmen. Moreover, the discovery of the diaries of former Naval Forces Commander, Admiral Özden Örnek, in 2004 revealed coup plans under the code names of Blond Girl (Sarıkız) and Moonlight (Ayışığı), devised by the Land and Air Forces and Gendarmerie Commanders. In addition, in an attempt to undermine and overthrow the government, other operations called Sea Sparkle (Yakamoz), Glove (Eldiven) and Cage (Kafes) were planned by military members who perceived the AK Party government to be an open threat to the secularity principle of the Republic.

Balyoz was the most significant of these plans since it aimed at provoking high tension to eventually justify a military takeover. Planned activities included blowing up mosques during Friday prayers, setting off terrorist acts, assassinating political figures, attacking museums and initiating a conflict with Greece. There were also plans to start a psychological warfare unit to weaken Islamic reactionaries and promote more hardline generals to the position of Chief of General Staff. The charges and later verdicts, which created a complicated political controversy, seriously weakened the military’s credibility.

The trials also allowed the AK Party to consolidate its supremacy over the military’s promotion system. For example, half of all Turkish admirals and one in ten active-duty generals were in prison in early 2012, accused of planning a coup against the government. Following a disagreement with Prime Minister Erdoğan over promoting members charged with plotting a coup in the Balyoz trial, the Chief of General Staff Işık Koşaner resigned in July 2011 and the heads of the army, navy, and air force requested early retirement. Despite the media’s coverage of the event as a ‘political earthquake’, the government normalized the resignations by stating that appointments and promotions in the military would be made in line with laws regulating dismissal and promotion, and swiftly appointed the former Gendarmerie General Commander, General Necdet Özel, as Land Forces Commander and acting Chief of General Staff. Thus, by intervening in these appointments, the government showed that civilian institutions now had oversight over military decisions.

Besides the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, an important step in the democratization of civil-military relations was taken when the investigations and trials were started for the perpetrators of the 1980 and 1997 coups. This was made possible by constitutional amendments in 2010 that annulled Temporary Ar-
article 15 of the constitution, which had granted coup leaders comprehensive immunity from prosecution. Hundreds of members of the parliament from different political parties presented motions to the parliament to start investigation into the March 12th, 1971 Coup by Memorandum, the September 12th, 1980 coup and the February 28th, 1997 post-modern coup. A coup investigation commission was established to look into all aspects of the impact of these coups on legal, political and social life in Turkey. The commission aimed at initiating constitutional amendments to avoid such coups in the future.21 The ground-breaking trial of those behind the 1980 coup started in April 2012, while the one concerning the 1997 coup started in September 2013, with 103 suspects expected to come to the court. Although the Turkish military seemed to have substantial public support in carrying out each coup, it lost a lot of credibility and trust for its violation of political rights, civil liberties and, more significantly, human rights. While the military officers responsible for the 1980 coup are too old and unhealthy to be imprisoned, the perpetrators of February 28th coup will probably receive long prison terms.

Second, due to a flourishing economy, which achieved economic growth of an average rate of 7.5% annually, an increase in average per capita income, attracted an unprecedented level of foreign direct investment, and survived the financial crisis of 2008, the AK Party increased its votes in three consecutive elections. Moreover, the party was able to strengthen its power and support due to its delivery of better social services, particularly in health care and housing (albeit through its formidable grassroots network and with governmental institutions), infrastructure improvement in poorer urban districts and prioritization of the rights of Kurds and non-Muslims. In addition, the AK Party’s attempts to be a role model in the Middle East made it a credible ally in the eyes of the Western world. All these accomplishments led to the consolidation of the AK Party’s power, which made it very difficult for the military to intervene. In contrast, each coup was initiated against either weak authoritarian governments or fragmented coalition governments that lost control over an economic crisis or law and order.

The strengthening of the AK Party’s political power, which led to the rise of a counter-elite of pro-Islamic conservatives and liberals, weakened the political influence of the military’s secularist allies in the judiciary, politics and the media, as well as certain sections of society. The newly emerging conservative Muslim elite has become influential in the economy, political society, the media and the judiciary, replacing the military’s allies in elite bureaucratic cir-

Domestic and foreign political interventions by the military transformed the power struggle between the AK Party and the army into an open conflict.
The military had maintained its strength and justified its political role by alerting its allies about the danger of communist ideologies throughout the 1970s, and Islamic reactionary and Kurdish separatist threats throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. However, once these threats ceased to exist or were taken under governmental control through desecuritization policies, the military's power in politics started to erode.

Until recently, the government's desecuritization policies, which removed security issues from the military's sphere of control by reducing their threatening conditions, have had a significant impact on reducing the military's domestic and foreign policy influence. The AK Party first focused on desecuritizing significant threats that the military had been too sensitive about to leave to civilian authorities: the rise of political Islam and the Kurdish separatist movement, as well as problematic relations with neighbors. Although one can observe that, with the coup plans that led to Ergenekon and Balyoz trials, the government was not very convincing when it desecuritized the rise of political Islam. Concerning the rise of Kurdish separatism, the AK Party government seemed genuinely determined to end PKK attacks by resolving the issue peacefully. In this respect, its project of ‘democratic openings’, which started in 2009 and is currently called the ‘democratic resolution process’ (resolution of the Kurdish issue), is nowadays taking a new turn towards initiating more political rights and civil liberties for the Kurdish population in return for ending the PKK's armed struggle and the withdrawal of armed Kurdish groups from Turkey. Despite recently emerging stumbling blocks (e.g. Turkish support for the Syrian opposition, the change of governments in Iraq and Iran's support for the Assad government in Syrian civil war) that emerged between the Turkish government and its neighbors, which had harmonious relations throughout most of the 2000s, the government controlled decision-making concerning recent threats by referring to, rather than loyally following, the expert opinions of the military.
of civilian courts. In February 2010, the government curbed another formal institution through which the military had exerted power, the secret protocol on Security, Public Order and Assistance Units (commonly called EMASYA). This protocol had permitted the military to conduct operations concerning internal security matters without the consent of civilian authorities.24

In order to give the civilians an upper hand in the fight against terror, the parliament adopted a law establishing an Undersecretariat for Public Order and Security under the Ministry of the Interior in February 2010. The new unit’s job was to produce new anti-terror policies with the help of personnel it recruited from the National Intelligence Organization, the General Staff, the gendarmerie and the police department. The law also established an Intelligence Assessment Center to strengthen intelligence-sharing between security institutions. A regulation on the internal audit and management of movable properties of the armed forces, the national intelligence agency and the national policy was adopted in July 2010. The Law on the Court of Accounts was implemented in December 2010 to increase civilian oversight over military expenditures. Another regulation enacted in August 2012 gave parliament the right to approve the publication of the Turkish Court of Accounts’ external audit reports related to security, defense and intelligence institutions.25 Civilians have also become involved in planning the National Security Policy Document (Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi – MGSB), which determines the country’s national interests, identifies national threat perceptions and designs policies to deal with them. The MGSB, commonly known as the “red book”, used to be prepared by the office of the Chief of General Staff and the MGK without conferring with parliament, and the cabinet and government were forced to follow its decisions without opposition. Now, however, the government is actively involved in determining the threats to the country and the methods that should be followed to respond to these dangers.26

One last crucial policy which aimed at subordinating the military to civilian oversight was introduced in July 2013. Its purpose was to amend the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law. Although Article 35 defined the duty of the Turkish Armed Forces ‘to protect the Turkish homeland, constitution and the Republic,’ it has always been interpreted by the military officers as protecting the country from enemies abroad and within, thereby giving the military the duty to protect the country from internal threats through coups. In its amended form, the military’s mission is more narrowly defined as “defending Turkish soil against external dangers or threats, empowering the military to ensure deterrence, fulfilling missions abroad with the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s authorization and helping to maintain international peace,”27 which reduces its scope to intervene in domestic politics. Moreover, it also strengthens the involvement of the parliament in the military’s operations.
Civil-Military Relations during the AK Party Era: Major Challenges

As already stated in the introduction, the subordination of the military to civilian control and its commitment to a democratic constitutional order is essential to achieve democratic consolidation. The military’s decreasing political influence appears to be moving Turkish civil-military relations towards a democratic model, as the Turkish Armed Forces, stripped of a number of its formal and informal powers, seems to have been subordinated to civilian political authority. As Richard Kohn explains, to achieve civilian control “all decisions of government, including national security, are to be made or approved by officials outside the professional armed forces, in a democracy, by popularly elected officeholders or their appointees.”

Currently, the AK Party government has asserted civilian supremacy over the military and the party’s political cadres are making all governmental decisions, including the formulation and implementation of defense policy and national security, while drawing on the military’s expert opinions. For example, in the late 2000s, the military has obeyed the decisions of the civilian government in the protocols signed with Armenia, the improvement of relations with Northern Iraq, the negotiations between the leaders of the Turkish and Greek communities in Cyprus and regarding relations with Israel. At present, the government dominates Turkish foreign policy towards Syria by making decisions as to whether Turkey will respond to Syrian cross-border attacks or its regime’s use of chemical weapons. The Turkish government is also in charge of the democratic resolution process aiming to reach a peaceful agreement with Kurdish leaders in Turkey.

However, the subordination of the military to civilian political authority does not by itself make Turkish civil-military relations democratic. To achieve genuinely democratic civil-military relations, as already stated an appropriate balance of power must be established between the civilian government and the armed forces. As mentioned in the introduction, while the military, which holds the coercive power to protect the country, must not use this power for any reason against its own people and must abandon a state of mind that directs it to such interventions, the civilians, while having authority over the armed forces, are not supposed to treat them unfairly. However, there are shortcomings on both sides. On the one hand, despite the military’s evident acceptance of the government’s policies, it does not appear to be altering its mindset of having the national duty to be the ultimate guardian of the state and protect the Republic from internal and external threats. The national security culture is deeply rooted in the Turkish military and maintains its potency due to ongoing ethnic separatism, as well as regional security challenges. As stated by Ali Karaosmanoğlu,
this relation is shaped by “military doctrine, historical experiences, security culture and the military’s mindset.”30 The civilians, on the other hand, have failed to ensure a fair trial for military officers and the others accused in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases, at least according to former senior military officers, secularist circles, parts of the media and some civil society organizations.31

In an attempt to analyze the military’s mindset, Aydınlı identifies two types of military officers. The traditional conservatives/absolutists view the Turkish military as the ultimate guardian of the status quo, and favor rapid and military-directed steps toward modernization. The progressives/gradualists consider the military’s mission as guarding the ongoing transformation and modernization of the nation. They regard coups and other harsh actions as counterproductive, preferring to work with civilians to achieve modernization.32 Along the same line, Tanel Demirel also classifies Turkish officers in two groups. The first consists of those officers who recognize that given current changing dynamics, it is difficult to follow former methods of initiating coups or manipulating civil society in order to watch over and protect the Turkish Republic. This group prefers to adopt the controlled change model, making it open to reconsidering religion-state relations and the Kurdish question from different perspectives. The second group is formed of those officers who prefer to continue with the same military tutelary regime institutionalized during the Cold War, even by resorting to coups to maintain its dominance.33 Similarly, Ali Karaosmanoğlu points out how Turkish military officers believed that subordination to civilian politicians would prejudice their role of guardianship and even the most-democratically oriented generals, such as one of the former Chiefs of Staff General Hilmi Özkök, were not able to get over with this predicament.34 In other words, the internalization of the principle of civilian supremacy over the armed forces has not been adopted by the military officers.35

Despite the tremendous progress towards the democratization of civil-military relations in Turkey, these categorizations indicate that hard-liners still exist in the military. As long as their mindset and embedded ideas do not change, Turkey will not easily achieve genuine democratic civil-military relations.

The military’s organizational culture actually defines its collective identity, which shapes its behavior in the political system and it is revealed in its military training and education.36 This training and education, which falls under the military’s absolute bureaucratic and ideological control, currently indoctrinates military students into the guardianship role of Kemalist principles and reforms. Military cadets think that they form a privileged class in Turkish society with every right to intervene politically whenever they perceive any deviation from accepted principles and reforms. Due to the strongly rooted and institutionalized tutelary inclination in the military, the transformation of its thinking and organizational culture is essential to decrease the likelihood of future military interventions.37
The other significant shortcoming from the civilian side, at least according to top military commanders, secularist circles, civil society organizations, various international organizations and a significant faction of the media, is the judicial system’s inappropriate handling of the investigations and trials, including misapplication of criminal procedures, in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases. According to critics, such practices have so far diverted attention from the real opportunity provided by these trials, namely to allow Turkey to escape from decades of military tutelage and achieve democratic civil-military relations with the firm subordination of the military to civilian control. By revealing the so-called ‘deep state’, these cases should have aimed at improving the functioning of democratic institutions and the rule of law in Turkey. However, as noted in the EU’s 2011 and 2012 Progress Reports on Turkey, the secrecy of the investigations, restrictions on access to certain evidence referred to in the indictments, the failure to give detailed grounds for decisions on pre-trial detention, and the excessively long and catch-all indictments have raised concerns about the rights of the defendants and the fairness of the trials.

Concerning the Balyoz case, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) also criticized the defense's inability to call witnesses, the court’s refusal to appoint experts to assess the validity of digital evidence and the lack of confidential attorney-client communications. Moreover, the confiscation of an unpublished book as evidence of a crime has violated press freedom in Turkey. The sudden reassignment of three specially authorized prosecutors and the Deputy Director of Intelligence for Istanbul, who was in charge of the Ergenekon case in 2011, were signs of the uneasiness of the judicial authorities with the handling of the investigations.

Overall, the conduct of the investigations and trials has eroded the judicial system’s impartiality and legality, which has increased the military’s distrust of the civilian government. Given these issues, shortcomings on both the military and civilian side need to be addressed in order to establish trust between the two units. A new conception of military education and training must be implemented to alter the military’s current guardianship mindset, while any future trials of military officers must be conducted under fairer conditions. These steps are essential, as the current uneasiness in relations between civilians and the military may hinder the establishment of fully democratic civil-military relations in Turkey.

**Concluding Remarks**

Civil-military relations in Turkey have entered a new period after a dramatic transformation that could not have been dreamed of only 15 years ago. Due to EU-mandated reforms, the military first lost the formal tutelary powers it
had gained after each coup, followed by its informal mechanisms, including political statements and briefings, due to the erosion of its credibility in the recently concluded Ergenekon and Balyoz and the 1980 and 1997 coup trials. These trials have strengthened democracy in Turkey by making it more difficult for the military to attempt to overthrow a popularly elected government ever again. Turkey has moved closer to democratic civil-military relations, where the democratically elected government can formulate and implement both general and defense policies without interference from the military. The civilian government still relies on the expert opinions of the military, as Turkey lives with constant domestic and international security threats. However, it is now the civilians who make the final decisions concerning these threats and how to deal with them.

However, there are few weaknesses in this apparent shift towards fully democratic civil-military relations. One concerns changing the military’s firmly-rooted institutional mindset of being the guardian of the state and the problem of non-internalization of civilian control in the military. The second issue relates to the just treatment of military officers in civilian trials. Once the military education system has been reformed so that military graduates are no longer indoctrinated into the guardianship role and military officers and secularist circles are able to start trusting the judicial system, perhaps the two most important stumbling blocks to democratic civil-military relations can be overcome.

Important institutional issues, such as those mentioned in the 2012 EU Progress Report, must be resolved through changes in regulations and constitutional amendments. These include further reforms of the military justice system, civilian oversight of the Gendarmerie, transparency and accountability of the security sector, exposure of the details of off-budget military expenditure, amendment of the Law on Provincial Administrations, reform of the dual civilian and military court systems, changes to the composition and powers of the Supreme Military Council, and placing the Chief of the General Staff under the Prime Minister rather than the Minister of Defense.\textsuperscript{42}

One final significant issue relates to the determination of the civilians to resolve the Kurdish question peacefully through democratic resolution process. PKK terror and the way it was dealt by the military have harmed Turkish political and economic life for decades, while costing the lives of tens of thousands of people. Failure of the government to resolve this sensitive and complicated issue may lead to a reversal of the current fall in PKK attacks and violence in

\textbf{The military’s decreasing political influence appears to be moving Turkish civil-military relations towards a more democratic model}
the country, which in turn could increase nationalist sentiment and revival of its deeply rooted national security culture, leading to the military’s involvement in politics.

Endnotes


2. Ibid., xxviii.


4. Zeki Sarıgil also makes a similar argument on Turkish civil-military relations in his “work-shirk configurations in a civil–military context” framework. See Zeki Sarıgil, “Turkish Military: Principal or Agent?” Armed Forces & Society, (2012), pp. 16-18; For the argument of unfair treatment of military members by the judiciary in the Ergenekon and Balyoz cases see Müge Aknur, “Towards More Democratic Civil-Military Relations in Turkey,” L’Europe en formation, (Journal of Studies on European Integration and Federalism), No: 367 (Spring 2013).


6. Although secularism refers to the separation of the mosque and the state, in the Turkish context, more often the French concept, which requires the subordination of religion to the state, has been practiced. Nationalism, with its focus on strengthening the Turkish nation-state, has also emphasized the territorial integrity of the Turkish state.

7. Zeki Sarıgil considers the period between 1924-1960 as civilocracy, characterized by civilian supremacy and the relegation of the military to a secondary position vis-a-vis the ruling Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi –CHP). However, since the CHP was dominated by former military officers, this author considers this period as falling under the influence of the military. Sarıgil also recognizes this issue by citing Huntington’s statement that “CHP came out of the womb of the army,” Sarıgil, “Turkish Military,” pp. 6-8; For a detailed analysis of this period see William Hale, “The Turkish Republic and its Army, 1923-1960,” Turkish Studies, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), pp. 191-201.


14. The Gülen Movement led by Fethullah Gülen to spread Islamist thought, has built more than 1,000 schools all over the world. National View (Milli Görüş) is considered as a strongly conservative religious community in Europe.

15. However, as part of Sixth Harmonization Package in summer 2003, the AK Party government removed Article 8 of the “Law for the Struggle against Terrorism” of 1991, which had made it an offence to make oral propaganda as support to those that are considered terrorists.


17. 2008 European Progress Report states that the Şemdinli bombing is concerned with the bombing of a bookshop that took place in the heavily Kurdish populated southeastern town of Şemdinli in November 2005 in which one person was killed and others were injured. When the case involved high-ranking military commanders, as a result of General Staff’s critics of the indictment and in April 2006, the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors dismissed the Şemdinli prosecutor from office. European Commission Turkey 2008 Progress Report, retrieved September 9, 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2008/turkey_progress_report_en.pdf


20. For an in depth analysis of these coup plots, see Gareth Jenkins, Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey’s Ergenekon Investigation, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies, Silk Road Paper, August 2009.


23. For more details concerning the desecuritization policies of AK Party see Bardakçı, “Coup Plots,” p. 413.


26. The focus of the MGSBs switched from the communist threat during the Cold War period to PKK separatist terror and the rise of irtica-religious reactionaryism throughout the 1990s. While the 2005 MGSB included PKK terror and irtica as domestic threats, the 2010 MGSB excluded irtica as a domestic threat, merely referring to “radical groups exploiting religion”. For details, see Özcan, “Türkiye Diş Politika Oluşum Sürecinde Algılamaları”, pp. 855-6; Uzgel, “TDP’nin Oluşturulması”, pp. 87-88; Gencer Özcan, “Milli Güvenlik Kurulu,” Ümit Cizre (ed), Almanak Türkiye 2005, Güvenlik Sektörü ve Demokratik Gözetim, DCAF-TESEV Güvenlik Sektörü Çalışmaları Dizisi, Özel Yayın, (İstanbul: TESEV, 2006), pp. 38-40


31. For a similar argument on the military’s unfair treatment, see Aknur, “Towards More Democratic Civil-Military Relations in Turkey,” p. 47.


34. Karaman, “Transformation of Turkey’s Civil-Military Culture,” p. 260. Aydınlı makes the same argument and points out this mindset in the speeches of more moderate Chiefs of General Staff Hilmi Özkök and Işık Koşaner concerning the planned changes (at the time) on Article 35. While Özkök was against the change, arguing that such an article was needed for the military to limit the excessive policies of the civilians, Koşaner claimed that, even if the article were removed, the military would still continue its natural, historical mission [protecting the country from internal and external threats]. Aydınlı, “Turkey under the AKP,” pp.104-105.


36. Sangoğlu, “Civil-Military Relations beyond Dichotomy,” p. 273. Sangoğlu, who analyzes civil-military relations from a principal-agent framework, sees the military’s organizational culture as a crucial condition to establish civilian control of the armed forces. He also formulates a framework that examines “work-shirk configurations in a civil–military context.” According to this framework, when both military and civilians work, effective civilian control that corresponds to Samuel Huntington’s civilian control can be achieved. In contrast, working of the civilians and shirking of the military leads to friction between civilian and military leaderships. When civilians shirk and the military works, this can lead to Huntington’s subjective control, in which civilians do not pay attention to national security and politicize the military. Finally, when both parties shirk, that can lead to political disorder. When the shortcomings are on the civilian side, see Sangoğlu’s analysis of his third quadrant, where the civilians shirk while the military is working. Sangoğlu, “Turkish Military,” pp. 16-18.

37. Aydınlı, “Turkey under the AKP,” p. 102; Aydınlı, “A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals,” p. 586; Demirel, “2000’li Yıllarda Asker ve Siyaset,” p. 13; Also See “Meclis Araştırma Raporu,” Cilt 1, (Kasım 2012), p. 132; Bardakç, “Coup Plots,” pp. 423-424. Bardakç argues that military ideology had been a major obstacle hindering democratic consolidation in Turkey, since any deviation from the Turkish and secular character of the nation-state was considered to be opposed to Kemalist ideology and any public assertions of Kurdish identity or Islamic cultural symbols were seen as a threat to security.

38. For a detailed analysis of the Turkish top commanders’ (Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ and Işık Koşaner) reaction to the handling of the cases, see Sangoğlu, “Turkish Civil-Military,” pp. 18-19.


It is not uncommon to assume that the Turkish military’s influence over politics has sharply decreased during the JDP governments. However, the JDP’s de-militarization policy has not produced a consolidated democracy and militarism has not totally disappeared from the legal, economic and social spheres. The JDP has pursued a pragmatic policy that aims to keep the military from toppling civilian governments but avoids making democratic reforms in order to consolidate its power in domestic politics. As a result of this policy, state institutions including the Turkish Armed Forces have become non-transparent and non-accountable. In the final analysis, the military has remained a black box despite the fact that its scope and influence has narrowed down.

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Introduction

“Every Turk is born a soldier” has been the slogan of the Turkish army on national celebration days for years. Actually, this statement reflects the philosophy of militarism in Turkey. It has an ontological premise that highlights the congruence between being a soldier and being a Turk. This congruence also includes a causal connection. If a citizen adopts Turkish identity, he/she should automatically accept his/her soldier’s role in society. In other words, denial of being a soldier is synonymous for rejecting Turkish identity. Therefore, it would not be wrong to argue that unconditional commitment to the military is required for one to demonstrate his/her loyalty to Turkish identity and the Turkish state. That is to say, the Turkish military regards itself as immune from any criticisms and views such challenges as treason.

Militarism in Turkey has not only demanded social cohesion and commitment but also sought a dominant role in the political sphere. After the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the military directly intervened in politics and toppled elected governments in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. In addition to its presence in social and political space, it should be noted that the Turkish military has become one of the major actors of the economy with the help of affiliated companies. In the final analysis, the military’s role in society, politics and the economy has imprinted the political history of the Turkish republic.

Nevertheless, the influence of the military has sharply declined since the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power in 2002. Intrinsically, after the JDP took office, it was not uncommon to presume that there would be an unavoidable clash between the JDP, which was formed by ex-political Islamist figures, and the military, which defines itself as the guardian of the secular republic. Nevertheless, the JDP was able to form a large coalition among the various sections of society which suffer from militarism in the social, political and economic realms. Thus, learning from the experiences of previous Islamist parties, the JDP managed to shift the axis of the debate from secularism versus Islamism to democracy versus militarism. As a result of this struggle, the JDP has pushed the military out of politics. However, contrary to what is believed, the de-militarization of politics has not fuelled democratic development in Turkey. The coalition around the JDP has begun to dissolve with the rise of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s authoritarian tendencies.

In line with the changing nature of civilian-military relations under the rule of the Justice and Development Party, this paper aims to answer the question of why de-militarization has not produced a consolidated democracy in Turkey. In doing so, the rise and fall of the military in Turkish politics will be examined in its historical context. Then, the
question of how the military will position itself under the rule of the JDP, which has gradually consolidated its power, will be discussed.

Historical Background

The military’s influence over civilian politics has become one of the major problems of the democratization process in Turkey. After the multi-party system was introduced in 1945, the Democratic Party was established and won the 1950 parliamentary elections against the Republican People’s Party (RPP), which is the founding party of modern Turkey. However, the Democratic Party government was toppled by the 1960 military coup, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was executed by the junta and a new constitution was introduced. The increasing authoritarianism of the Menderes government was the legitimizing basis for the military’s intervention. Thus, the 1961 constitution included new “check and balance” mechanisms in order to prevent elected governments from pursuing an authoritarian agenda. Accordingly, the separation-of-powers principle was adopted, labor unions were allowed, universities and the TRT (state-owned TV channel) gained autonomy. Nevertheless, contrary to such democratic steps, the 1961 constitution also created a new institution called the “National Security Council” (NSC), which paved the way for the military’s influence over the decision-making process in both the domestic and international realms.

The NSC is designed to be an advisory body dealing with internal and external threats. Nevertheless, the military used the NSC to intervene in politics because any issue, regardless of its scope, could be related to a security concern. Thus, the NSC as an advisory body became a platform that helped the military to dictate its agenda to civilian governments. As Cizre argues, the NSC acted like a “shadow government”. That is to say, the 1961 constitution aimed to check and balance civilian governments but inevitably made the government dysfunctional.

According to Faroz Ahmad, the Turkish military’s engagement in politics also shaped its approach to the economy. He argues that the military’s commitment to a free market economy under the conditions of the Cold War was crucial. Thus the OYAK (Turkish Armed Forces Assistance and Pension Fund) was founded as a corporate entity, which is subject to a private code. According to OYAK Code 205, OYAK is exempt from

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corporate income tax and its assets, incomes and claims have the same rights and privileges that government properties have. On the other hand, OYAK enjoys wide autonomy and behaves like a free market actor under the shield of legal protection⁴.

The military consolidated its influence over politics and the economy after the 1980 military coup. With tension mounting between rightist and leftist groups and polarization increasing between political parties, the military seized power and banned all of the political parties, labor unions and almost all of civil society organizations. The autonomy of the universities was abolished and the 1982 constitution was drafted and ratified. The new era made the military the leading player in Turkish politics. Although political parties were re-instated, the NSC’s influence over politics continued with the help of two security threats. First, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish state and Kurdish secessionism threatened the nation-state principle as well as the territorial integrity of Turkey. Second, the rise of political Islam, which was represented by Necmettin Erbakan’s Welfare Party, challenged the secular character of the republic⁵.

It would not be wrong to argue that these threats produced justifications for the military to intervene in the political space. In doing so, the Turkish military pointed out its legal responsibility, which is set down in article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) Internal Service Code. Accordingly, “the duty of the Armed Forces is to protect and safeguard the Turkish homeland and the Turkish Republic as stipulated by the Constitution”. This article implies that Turkish Armed Forces have the authority to define what the threat is and determine how to avert that threat. In line with this point of view, one can argue that the TAF became the guardian of the constitution’s “national unity principle” against the PKK and of its “secularism principle” against political Islam.

The aforementioned legal justifications enabled the Turkish military to pursue its own methodology against the PKK and political Islam by bypassing the policies of civilian political actors. That is not to say that there was a huge polarization between the TAF and the civilian governments. However, the TAF expected the political actors to acknowledge its red lines. This means that the Turkish military left little room for civilian policy makers and exerted its influence over politics. As a result of this, armed struggle was seen as the only solution to defeat the PKK, and the Turkish military became the main addressee of the Kurdish

question. On the other hand, the rise of political Islam and the dividedness of the centralist parties attracted the military into politics. After the Islamist Welfare Party and the central rightist True Path Party formed a coalition government in 1996, the NSC gave an ultimatum to the government and forced Necmettin Erbakan to resign. This intervention is known as the February 28 post-modern coup. What made the coup post-modern was its methodology, because the military managed to eliminate the Welfare Party without suspending the whole political system. However, the TAF continued to intervene in politics, bureaucracy, the media, universities, civil society and economics.

The Turkish Armed Forces was the absolute kingmaker of Turkey’s politics in 1999. In this year, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was arrested and the PKK declared a ceasefire. On the other hand, after the Welfare Party was abolished and its leader Necmettin Erbakan was banned from politics, the popularity of political Islam considerably declined and a new coalition government was formed by social democrat, nationalist and centralist parties after parliamentary elections. In the final analysis, the TAF kept and consolidated its guardianship role in the system by successfully averting secessionism and Islamism threats.

Nevertheless, the military-backed political atmosphere of Turkey produced losers as well. In the aftermath of the February 28, 1997 post-modern coup d'état the military defined secularism in an aggressive manner by banning political Islamist parties (the Welfare and Virtue parties) and excluding a conservative way of life from the public sphere. For example, students wearing headscarves were not allowed to enter universities. In addition to political Islamists and conservatives, Kurds also suffered from the military’s influence over politics. Kurdish parties were banned several times in the 1990s and the Kurdish people’s demand for political rights was regarded as a security issue due to the militarization of the Kurdish question. In addition to Islamists and Kurds, liberal circles became the strong opponents of the military. According to the liberal intellectuals, the military’s influence over politics undermines the fundamentals of democratic principles, which are the sine qua non for the European Union admission process.

The discontent of these circles was fuelled by the failure of the coalition government to provide economic stability. In 2001 there was a dramatic economic crisis and the popularity of the coalition parties sharply decreased. The collaboration between liberals and political Islamists was the product of this atmosphere. It should be noted that the transformation of the prominent figures coming from the political Islamist tradition played a key role in the occurrence of this alignment.
institutions, including the European Union. Moreover, the Welfare Party was in favor of command economy and a common market with the Islamic world. On the other hand, the reformist wing of the political Islamists led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç defined themselves as “conservative democrats” and adopted a more inclusive stance. In addition to that, they viewed the European Union admission process as an opportunity to undermine the influence of the secular army, which could prevent a popular conservative party from coming to power. Finally, the reformist wing of political Islam endorsed liberal values such as democracy and the free market in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of domestic and international society.

The ideological discrepancy between orthodox political Islam and its reformist wing gave birth to the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 2001. The transformation of this younger generation and their split from the orthodox views of Erbakan produced a coalition between them and various sections of society such as liberals, moderate conservatives, business circles, pro-EU intellectuals and commentators and some prominent figures in the Kurdish national movement. In other words, the JDP became a venue for the discontented with the military-backed nation statist and secularist regime to converge on. This is to say, these circles supported the JDP’s struggle against the military’s role in the political system, its enthusiasm to fulfill the EU admission process and make constitutional amendments, despite the reactions of nationalist and secularist groups. During the heyday of this coalition, the JDP, which came to power with 34% of votes in 2002, gradually increased its popularity and won 47% in 2007 and 50% in the 2011 parliamentary elections. In ten years, the JDP eliminated the military and became the absolute authority in the political system.

Erdoğan’s Third Way: De-militarized but Non-democratic

The de-militarization of political space imprinted the years under JDP rule. On the one hand, Turkey’s admission process to the EU helped the JDP to undermine the influence of the military. In line with the harmonization packages, the role of the National Security Council was re-defined. Accordingly, the NSC code has been amended and has been subordinated to civilian political authority. The number of civilians in the council has increased and the government has become authorized to appoint the secretary of NSC. Furthermore, legal justifications for
military interventions such as the EMASYA Protocol and Article 35 of the TAF internal service code were abolished. The parliament has been authorized to delegate the Court of Accounts to audit the Turkish Armed Forces.

In addition to the legal amendments, some of the military staff, including high-ranking generals and officers, were accused of planning a coup against the JDP government. The prosecutor has called the investigations the “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz” cases and argued that there is a junta in the Turkish Armed Forces that deliberately destabilizes the country in order to gain opportunities to intervene in politics. It would not be wrong to argue that, with detainment of high-ranking generals including the Head of General Staff and force commanders, the military’s untouchable image has been heavily tarnished in the eyes of society.

However, the de-militarization process has not contributed to the democratic consolidation process. After the fall of the military’s influence over politics, the Erdoğan government has remained as the absolute winner of domestic competition for power thanks to the JDP’s election victories. The votes of the JDP have gradually increased since the 2002 elections and hit 50% in the 2011 elections. This means that the JDP gained 326 seats out of 550 in parliament. Following the 2011 elections, intellectual circles, which helped the JDP to undermine the influence of the military, started to criticize the JDP by arguing that Erdoğan had lost his energy to make democratic reforms. According to them, Erdoğan has pragmatically approached democracy, the European Union admission process and de-militarization in order to avert pressure from the military, which regards itself as the guardian of secularism and is responsible for security issues.

In line with the criticisms from intellectuals, it would not be wrong to argue that defeat of the military has changed the JDP’s relations with the domestic actors as well. Erdoğan was inclined to form coalitions with the actors of civil society and the political spectrum. For example, Erdoğan asked for the support of socialists, liberals, nationalists and conservatives to make amendments in 1982 to the Constitution, which was written and approved after the 1980 coup d’état. However, after the JDP pushed the military out of the political arena and won 50% of the total votes in 2011, Erdoğan left his pluralist approach and adopted a majoritarian stance.

6 Emasya Protocol (The Protocol on Security, Public Order and Assistance Units) and Internal Service Code justify the military’s intervention if public order and constitution are at stake.

Building on this argument, questions about the position of the military in the Turkish political system acquire meaning especially after Erdoğan gained the upper hand and adopted authoritarian policies. This falsifies the causal relationship between the non-involvement of the military in politics and democratic development. Although many supporters of the JDP’s de-militarization campaign had believed that the TAF’s influence over politics was the main problem for the democratization process, they have observed that Erdoğan’s authoritarianism began to increase after the subordination of the military to the civilian JDP government. Therefore, one may wonder what the role and function of the military is in this process if the JDP government is criticized for being authoritarian.

An examination of how the legal, social and economic conditions of militarism have changed under the JDP government helps us to understand the position of the military in the current political context. First of all, as mentioned previously, the EU admission process helped the JDP to undermine the military’s legal justifications to some extent. However, the 1982 constitution, which was drafted and ratified under the rule of the National Security Council after the 1980 coup, is still in effect notwithstanding the amendments that have been made in following years. For example, the NSC is still a constitutional institution despite the fact that its structure has changed. According to Hakyemez, such structural changes are psychologically significant but do not abolish the military’s shadow over politics. Therefore, a new constitution, which should allow no room for the military, should be drafted.8

In addition to that, it is hard to argue that the TAF and its extensions into the economy have been fully audited by the Court of Accounts. According to the Court of Accounts Code, which became legal in 2010, Turkey’s Grand National Assembly is the authority that demands the auditing of public institutions, funds, foundations, associations, corporations, and companies. This means that the Court of Accounts is allowed to audit the TAF and affiliated entities such as OYAK and the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation (TAFF). However, as Kemal argues, lack of political will and governmental reluctance weaken the auditing process. For example, the JDP has amended the Court of Accounts Code and abolished its authority to make effectiveness and efficiency analyses. This means that the Court of Accounts has become responsible just for reporting rather than analyzing and investigating the expenditure process. In other words, auditing the military has turned into a mere reporting process. In addition

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to that, Kemal also argues that OYAK and TAFF retain their privileged positions and remain outside the auditing process⁹.

Finally, the social dimension of militarism has also managed to survive under the JDP’s rule. It can be argued that the military’s main tool in shaping society is military service, which is compulsory and applies to all male citizens. Aydın argues that conscription is not only the product of national security concerns but also reflects the military’s inclination to consolidate its position in the domestic realm. Therefore, the military regards conscription as a strategy to indoctrinate and educate society rather than a system to increase national defense capability¹⁰. According to the Head of General Staff, Necdet Özel, there are 405,000 conscripts in the military and the total number of military personnel is 670,000. This means that the TAF is the largest public institution in regard to numbers of employees.

In addition to the conscription problem, the autonomy of the Military Administrative Court and Military Court of Appeal also weakens the military’s transparency. According to constitutional amendments ratified by referendum on 12 September 2010, the military courts’ authority has been confined to having jurisdiction to try military personnel for military-related issues. This means that civilian courts have been authorized when military personnel are involved in non-military cases. Furthermore, this amendment has abolished the military courts’ authority to try civilians except in war times. However, it would not be wrong to argue that this amendment has not only restricted the scope of the military courts but also helped the military to consolidate its autonomy. That is to say, military courts have remained the highest judiciary body to try military personnel, including conscripts. Therefore, investigations into ill treatment and suspicious conscript suicides are carried out by military prosecutors and appealed by the Military Court of Appeal instead of the Supreme Court of Appeals. In other words, conscripts are deprived of the right of access to fair and impartial tribunals.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, it is an undeniable fact that the Turkish military’s influence over politics has sharply decreased during the JDP governments. However, it is hard to argue that militarism has totally disappeared from the legal, economic and social spheres. As research shows, the military (and its affiliated entities in the economy) have not been transparent and

accountable. The 1982 Constitution continues to legitimize the presence of the NSC in the decision-making process since the constitution-revision process failed in 2013. Furthermore, conscription has continued and judicial bodies of the TAF have kept their autonomy. This picture shows that the military is still a black box despite the fact that its scope has narrowed down.

Therefore, it can be argued that “subordination” is not the correct term that fully defines the relationship between the military and the civilian JDP government. Instead, the term “cooperation” based on bargaining and compromise is more applicable. That is to say, the JDP has chosen a third way between militarism and democracy, which could be called “de-militarization without democracy”. This means that the JDP has used the EU admission process and public support to deter the military from toppling the civilian government and consolidating its power in the political system. However, the JDP has been reluctant to make fundamental democratic reforms and root out militarism from the legal, social and economic realm. The rationale behind this policy is the JDP's reluctance to share the power of government with the other sections of society. It would not be wrong to argue that a new constitution based on the consensus of the main political actors, systemic auditing, transparency and accountability would not only undermine the power of the military but also limit the government’s sphere of influence. Thus, the JDP government has discovered a third way, which disempowers the military while keeping the civilian government unchecked and unbalanced. In the final analysis, the military’s shadow over the JDP government has disappeared but the democratic deficit of Turkey has become a system-wide problem.