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## From Guardianship to Civilian Control: How did the Turkish Military get here

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**Азия: вызовы и перспективы**

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## From Guardianship to Civilian Control: How Did the Turkish Military Get Here?

**ABSTRACT.** *This article examines how civilian-military relations in Turkey have transformed from a guardianship of the military to civilian control. To this end, it covers the following issues. It surveys the ways in which the military has instituted its influence over civilians from the 1960 military coup up until the early 2000s. It elaborates major events and processes that took place during the 2000s under the AKP governments. Then, the paper describes the reasons behind the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, before concluding with a discussion of the implications of the coup attempt. There will be both immediate and long-term implications of the radical changes*

*that the Turkish government made to civilian-military relations and to the organizational structure of the armed forces after the recent failed coup attempt.*

**KEYWORDS:** *civil-military relations, military forces, guardianship, civilian control, coup d'état, Turkey*

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## От опеки к гражданскому контролю: как изменилась роль турецкой армии?

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** В статье рассматривается трансформация военно-гражданских отношений в Турции на пути от опеки со стороны армии к гражданскому контролю. Для того чтобы произвести подобный анализ, в статье рассмотрены следующие аспекты проблемы. Автор описывает пути, по которым проходила институционализация военного влияния на граждан, начиная от военного переворота 1960 г. и заканчивая анализом событий начала 2000-х гг. В работе приведен ряд важнейших событий и процессов, протекавших в 2000-х гг., во время правления Партии справедливости и развития. Затем автор рассматривает причины неудачи военного переворота 15 июля 2016 г., что позволило также сделать вывод о влиянии попытки переворота в целом. Радикальные действия турецкого правительства станут причиной как серьезных краткосрочных, так и долгосрочных изменений в гражданско-военных отношениях Турции, равно как и в самой организационной структуре военных сил после недавней неудачной попытки переворота.

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** военно-гражданские отношения, армия, опека, гражданский контроль, военный переворот, Турция

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### Introduction

The coup attempt on July 15, 2016, was startling. For the first time in history, an extension of a clandestine group, the Gulenists – officially described as the Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) – intended to stage a coup. This event was shocking because no one could estimate the power of a secret organization within the army that has long been reputed of holding and protecting secular values. The failed coup attempt was not the first time in modern Turkish history that the military had planned to take over political power. However, the recent failed coup attempt was remarkably different from previous experiences. The military has intervened four times since the commencement of democratic elections so as to restore peace and maintain secular values. But these interventions were not plotted by a secret organization or faction. The presence of such factions has always been inconceivable because Turkish officer corps have come to be trained in accordance with Kemalism and secular values (Jenkins, 2005). Soldiers have seen themselves as being above

politics and political factions (Jacoby, 2003). Instead, they have embodied a guardianship role in order to protect the ethos of modernization and secularism from domestic and external threats (Hale, 2011). Officers have not always followed the chain of command in their interventions<sup>1</sup>. But the overall integrity and discipline of the army has never been disrupted. So how has such a dramatic change occurred? How might the revolutionary changes adopted by the government after the failed coup influence the military and civilian-military relations? This paper aims to shed some light on this question.

To start with, civilian-military relations – not merely in the Turkish case, but in general – represent a paradox. As Feaver suggests, “The very institution created to protect the polity is given sufficient power to become a threat to the polity” (Feaver, 1999, p. 214). Until recently, two fundamental works have dominated civilian-military relations: Samuel Huntington’s *The Soldier and the State* and Morris Janowitz’s (Janowitz, 1960) *The Professional Soldier*. Huntington was a political scientist, and he focused on how it was possible to establish civilian control over the military. Janowitz was a sociologist; he studied cultural aspects affecting the military identity and the relationship between soldiers and civilians.

Huntington (Huntington, 1957) stated that there could be two methods of controlling the military: subjective or objective control. Subjective control refers to civilian command over the details of the organizational structure. Such control intends to make the armed forces more like a civilian agency, as it eradicates the autonomy of the military by making promotions reliant on political contacts with the governing political party. In contrast, objective control aims to keep the civilian and military spheres separate by giving autonomy to the military in terms of steering their own organizational and bureaucratic structure. Such autonomy would be best achieved by professionalization in the army.

Janowitz (Janowitz, 1960) argued that Huntington’s approach could best capture the changes in the military identity. On his account, the military could not be isolated from the values and norms of the rest of society. If society constantly changes, the military must also adapt to such changes. Because the military is a conservative institution, it might be difficult for the armed forces to follow the changes that take place in society. The solution, then, is to narrow the gap between the military and armed forces. One way of achieving this, for example, is to break the monopoly of military academies by creating Reserve Training Officer Training Corps at universities.

Turkish armed forces gained autonomy in the 1950s after Turkey became a member of the NATO. Such autonomy strengthened the division between the military and civilian spheres, as soldiers grew into an independent class, separate from the rest of the society. Soldiers could also have autonomy in controlling their own organizational structure. What is more, the Turkish military intervened in politics and exerted influence on the shape of governments. That is, professionalism did not bring about objective control of the military (Stepan, 1988).

Since 2002, Turkey has tended to control the military by following remedies addressed in the literature (Feaver, 1999, p. 225–230). In line with Turkey’s bid for EU membership, the AKP governments accepted several constitutional and administrative restraints to curtail the legal grounds of the military power. However, these were not sufficient to prevent word of mouth spreading about the military discontent with the AKP governments during the 2000s and the onset of the July 15 coup attempt. Therefore, the government adopted new methods. It deployed the military away from the political centres and cities. Civilians took measures to divide loyalties in the army by creating parallel chains of command. They removed the coast guard and gendarmerie from the military and included them as countervailing institutions to

1 In 1960, the military did not follow the chain of command.

the interior ministry. In addition to these efforts that focus on reducing the ability of the military, the government also intends to reduce the disposition of the military to intervene. This is to be achieved by recruiting personnel who are inclined to obey, or by changing the ethic of the military in military schools. New generation officer corps would thus be trained with the culture of obedience to civilians. In sum, the government wants to control the military by following various established practices, yet without reducing the size of the army because the security threats remain. However, the new attempts appear to establish a more subjective control over the army, eroding the organizational and civilianizing the armed forces by closing military courts, military hospitals, and military academies and schools. But how have civilian-military relations in Turkey transformed from a guardianship of the military to civilian control?

The paper begins with an overview of the ways in which the military has instituted its influence over civilians from the 1960 military coup up until the early 2000s. The next section elaborates major events and processes that took place during the 2000s under the AKP governments. Then, the paper describes the reasons behind the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, before concluding with a discussion of the implications of the coup attempt.

## Military Influence

How could the Turkish military influence politics? What explains the power of the Turkish armed forces (TAF)? What are the main characteristics of the Turkish military? We need to address these questions before we turn to the recent radical changes that took place during the AKP period and following the July 15 coup attempt.

### GUARDIANSHIP

The Turkish military established its self-confidence and unchallenged power within a historical process. The political role of the military was primarily legitimated through

its guardianship (Demirel, 2004). The Turkish Republic was proclaimed after a war of independence and the victorious Turkish military acquired substantial prestige in the eyes of the people since the early days of the republic (Jenkins, 2007). The military became a central element of the establishment alongside the bureaucracy in these early days. However, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the new regime, banned the officer corps from engaging with politics. Soldiers had to resign if they intended to take active roles in politics (Hale, 2011, p. 195).

Despite the new regime's strict insistence on keeping soldiers out of the political process, moral and legal grounds for future military interventions were established in this period. The Armed Forces Internal Service Law, accepted in 1935, stipulates: "the duty of the armed forces is to protect and defend the Turkish homeland and the Republic of Turkey, as determined in the Constitution" (Hale, 2011, p. 195). This law, abolished in 2013, expressed the motto of the military's guardianship role. Such a role was regularly used during the democratic transition period, with the army creating further legal and institutional prerogatives that gave soldiers control over civilians.

The officer corps was strictly loyal to the newly established regime and to its secular and modern reforms (Satana, 2011). It had a self-authorized claim to protect the secular principles of the republic. But it would be incorrect to suggest that the armed forces intervened in each case (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997, and 2007) merely to prevent the Islamization of the country. The primary motivation of the 1960 takeover was to restrain the authoritarian leanings of the elected government, the Democrat Party (Güney, 2002, p. 164). The opponents of the Democrat Party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), bureaucrats and officers corps, speculated that the government of the day was about to establish a dictatorship. The main reason for the 1971 and 1980 interventions was the politically motivated violence in the country (Harris, 2011). In 1971, the military forced the government to leave the office to a technocratic government. In

1982, the military itself took control in order to end the political violence between the left and right wing groups, and to end the political deadlock when the violence and the political conflict in parliament made the country un-governable. In short, the primary aim of the military interventions of 1960, 1971, and 1980 was to make the country governable. Secularism has always been the central identity of the armed forces; however, it was not the driving force behind the military's decision to act in the respective interventions.

In one particular case, the military intervened politically to restore secularism in 1997, on February 28 (Narlı, 2011, p. 221). Political Islam, the roots of which date back to the 1970s, gained mass support during the 1990s as a response to the inability of the mainstream political parties to find a solution to growing economic problems (Harris, 2011, p. 209; Güney, 2002, p. 166–173). Political Islam gained momentum while mainstream politics was eroding. While the coalition government, established between the centre left and right in the early 1990s, was losing support, the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as the mayor of Istanbul in 1994 as a candidate of the Welfare Party was a critical milestone. Erdogan founded the AKP as a successor to the Welfare Party, the party that was the target of the military intervention in 1997 and that was closed by the constitutional court.

The military takeover in 1980 had an unintended consequence. The military junta wanted to curb the influence of leftist ideologies and for this reason encouraged the flourishing of a more conservative political movement that brought together nationalist and religious elements under the so-called Turkish-Islam synthesis (Kaplan, 2002). Paradoxically, the guardians of secularism unleashed a very dynamic political movement that would determine the future of Turkish politics and that would guide a process that undermines their own political power and autonomy.

The military warned civilians again in 2007 with the purpose of protecting secularism when the AKP planned to put forward Abdullah Gul as a candidate for the presidency. The

Chief in General, Yasar Buyukanit, warned the government and advised Mr. Gul to step back; even though a pious president may be tolerable, a first lady with a headscarf was inconceivable. The Chief in General may have intended to mobilize the secular masses with this act, similar to what soldiers had done in 1997, in order to negatively influence the public support of the AKP. But the opposite happened. The AKP called for an early election and it further increased its public support. It would not be wrong to define the election of Mr. Gul as president and the AKP's second electoral victory as a critical turning point in civilian-military relations in Turkey (Sargil, 2014, p. 180). With large support from the masses, and subsequently from disparate sectors of civil society, the AKP was, then, more confident in its position against the military.

The failed coup attempt in 2016, which will be examined in detail below, was presented by the plotters, the Gulenists, as a secular intervention. However, even in its early hours when it remained unclear which group in the armed forces organized the coup, the secular groups did not support the coup attempt. When President Erdogan called citizens to the streets in order to resist the plotters, many secular citizens joined the AKP supporters in order to protect democracy. It soon became apparent that it was not the Turkish army but an army within the army, a cabal of Gulenists, who were behind the coup attempt.

#### **LEGAL GUARANTEES AND SAFEGUARDS**

The Turkish military was politically influential and has always seen itself as an arbiter of domestic political problems (Jacoby, 2003). However, it differed from praetorian militaries in the sense that it accepted the legitimacy of civilians, the rule of law, and democracy (Sakallioglu, 1997, p. 153). Even though soldiers did not accept the right of civilians to be wrong, after each intervention, they returned to their barracks and left power to civilians. Nevertheless, soldiers left with exit guarantees that enabled them to control and influence the political field without having to take direct control (Demirel, 2004).

The key to the entrenchment of military influence over politics was the creation of the National Security Council with the 1961 constitution (Harris, 2011, p. 205). The council worked as a parallel executive organ under military control through which the soldiers could shape vital political issues, which are normally determined by civilians in democracies (Sakallioğlu, 1997). The 1982 constitution enhanced the powers of the council, as the government was required to give priority to the council's decisions (Sakallioğlu, 1997, p. 153–154). The council started working as a shadow government until its composition was significantly changed by the EU reform packages in 2003 and 2004 (Bayramoğlu, 2002).

### **PUBLIC SUPPORT**

The military could maintain supremacy because both the society and civilians did not challenge this supremacy (Demirel, 2004, p. 134). The public image of the military was largely positive until the 1980 coup, and the armed forces were the most respected and trusted institution (Sarigil, 2015, p. 284). The Turkish military, too, identifies itself with the nation. Political processes were perceived by soldiers to be corrupt, and political parties and politicians were seen to serve their own interests (Sakallioğlu, 1997, p. 156). On the whole, politicians could not completely restore confidence among citizens. In contrast, the military was not corrupted. It was seen as representing the common good, and its organizational structure privileged merit and success. They were careful not to be associated with any ideology or specific section of society. The military tried to cultivate and maintain an image of being an institution above politics, which implied not supporting any political party or taking sides with a particular ideology (Jacoby, 2003, p. 673). While in politics nepotism and favouritism were believed to be the norm, soldiers could successfully rely on this positive public image when

they acted to correct the failures of civilians (Tachau, Heper, 1983).

However, the military isolated itself from the rest of society. Soldiers built their own residential areas and fenced them off. They created separate social activity centers, restaurants and summer camps (Narlı, 2000). Despite such isolation, one cannot speak of any conflict between society and the soldiers. On the contrary, Turkish culture has many affinities to the military as an organization, and it embraces militaristic values (Cizre, 2004, p. 11; Altınay, 2004). However, Turkish culture is not monolithic, and identities (ethnic, religious and political) influence how people approach the soldiers. Sarigil (Sarigil, 2015) outlines some key factors that can determine different attitudes towards the military. While Turks have a pro-military attitude, Kurds have an anti-military attitude. Religious people, who also largely support the AKP, are more sceptical towards the political role of the military. Meanwhile, the opposition parties, including the Republicans (CHP) and nationalists, hold a positive view of the military<sup>2</sup>.

The traditionally positive image of soldiers was hampered by the 1980 military intervention and succeeding transitional military junta that lasted for three years, because of the excessive use of violence and suppression of political opposition. The new constitution, written and ratified under the military's control, was authoritarian (Isiksel, 2013). It reinforced military supremacy by means of strengthening the executive power of the military. The heyday of military supremacy over civilians was established after the 1980 military takeover and lasted until the early 2000s, when the EU reforms were launched.

### **NATIONAL SECURITY**

Another important factor that helped the entrenchment of the Turkish military's influence in the political sphere was its power to define national security issues (Cizre, 2007).

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2 The same research also finds that there is no strong evidence to suggest that military service reinforces militaristic culture and values in society.

Civilians appeared to accept this power. The Turkish army went through a strict professionalization process as early as the 1950s with its membership of NATO. Professionalization, however, has not stopped the military from intervening in politics, as Huntington suggested. In contrast, the military claimed epistemological and organizational authority over security issues. The Cold War, domestic turmoil and lasting political polarization helped legitimate the soldiers' control over security issues until the 1980s. In the 1990s, Islamic movements and Kurdish groups were deemed two vital threats to the regime.

The military resisted reforms to civilian-military relations during the 1990s by justifying the need for the securitization of domestic politics. Turkey's exceptional situation resulted from the growing power of political Islam and the activities of the separatist terror of the PKK (Cizre, Çınar, 2003, p. 315). The military did not hesitate to impose its own agenda of controlling and correcting elected politicians, as security constituted the main political concern. Civilians lacked the relevant knowledge and determination to govern the fight with the PKK. Politicians even invited soldiers themselves into the political arena; the conservative PM in the mid-1990s, Tansu Ciller, left fighting the PKK entirely to the military. During the 1990s the military described itself as "a guarantee not only for the regime but at the same time of democracy, societal peace and the modern life style" (Cizre, Çınar, 2003, p. 314). This background matters because the military gave up its power and privileged position in the Turkish political system as early as the 2000s by not openly resisting the AKP government and the move towards EU membership.

All in all, the military was autonomous but civilians were not. The Turkish military was protected from civilian interference; however, the opposite was not possible. Non-expert civilians could not coordinate the organizational structure of the armed forces and determine security and defense policies. Indeed, no politician intended to change this situation until the 2000s, with one exception: a previous president, Turgut Ozal, appointed

a military candidate as Chief in General and conflicted with the General Staff in terms of Turkey's involvement in *Operation Desert Storm* (Narlı, 2011, p. 219). However, the military could still interfere in politics and economics. Soldiers passed through a disciplined and well-organized education comparable to Western standards. They claimed to correct the failures of civilians (Jenkins, 2005). Legal safeguards and coordination of the defense sector secured the autonomy of the military to decide on promotions, recruitment, and appointments in its organizational structure, as well as on the military budget (Sakalhoğlu, 1997, p. 152). However, the military's autonomy was not restricted to its organizational side. Soldiers isolated themselves from the rest of society by building independent social facilities, including their own summer camps, restaurants, and recreational facilities (Narlı, 2000). This isolation has damaged the image of the military by depicting the army as a privileged class. What is more, the military also had economic investments and industrial facilities. The military held its own holding company, the Armed Forces Trust and Pension Fund (OYAK) (Akça, 2010, p. 5).

### AKP PERIOD

How did the AKP break the military's influence? The AKP promised to build a better democracy, and such a promise meant ending the military influence over politics. Turkish people trusted the military as an institution but also wanted the right of civilians to decide their own future under a democratic system.

The AKP mobilized disparate groups within society that demanded change (İnsel, 2003). It managed to mobilize a coalition that brought together different sections of society with the aim of curbing the influence of the military. The motivations of these groups differed. Liberals, socialists, and conservative democrats primarily focused on strengthening the liberal-democratic nature of the regime. On their account, civilian supremacy over the military must be coupled with the maintenance of rights and liberties. Religious groups, those which made up the backbone of the Islamist parties includ-

ing the AKP, supported the reforms concerning the establishment of civilian control over the military because the secular army did not tolerate any deviation from the secular norms that guided the public and social life.

The military has always been adamant about its role as guardian of the secular regime throughout the republican period, since 1923. But the so-called February 28 process in particular, referring to the military ultimatum that dissolved the centre-right (*Dogru Yol Partisi*) Islamists (*Refah Partisi*) coalition, had a dramatic effect on the Islamist groups. It is true that the non-traditional way of military interference through the use of threats of force was denied by many, including liberals, socialists, and other democratic groups. However, it was the Islamists who understood that it was not possible to converge with the military when they are in power.

The AKP abandoned political Islam at the outset (Yavuz, 2006). The founders of the AKP carefully declared the ideological motto of the new movement as conservative democracy. The charismatic leader of the AKP party, Mr. Erdogan, allayed fears concerning the real political goals of the newly emerged party by promising to advance Turkey's bid for EU membership (Hale and Ozbudun 2009). Such a promise meant anchoring Turkish democracy to EU norms including those concerning civilian-military relations (Cizre, 2007; Gürsoy, 2011). The success of the AKP here is that it has not defined the implementation of the EU reform packages as a challenge to the military. There was no need for such a heroic challenge when the governing party could already take steps to weaken the political influence of the military (Caliskan, 2017, p. 104).

In the 2002 elections, only two parties (AKP and CHP) could pass the 10 percent electoral threshold. The political stalemate of the 1990s alongside economic crises withered the mainstream political parties. In a two-party parliament, the AKP could dominate 66 percent of the seats. This supermajority could allow the government to pass fundamental constitutional amendments without having to consult the opposition group: the Republi-

cans. However, the AKP avoided any confrontation with either the opposition or the military. Instead, the government concentrated on EU membership and economic reforms.

Turkey's EU membership bid must be seen as the most significant factor that changed the nature and future of the civilian-military relations. When Turkey started negotiations with the EU, Turkey's legal and political system were required to adapt to EU laws and norms. An important part of those norms concerned the democratic oversight of the military and security sector (Cizre, 2007, p. 4). The so-called Copenhagen criteria – first applied to the Central and Eastern European countries in their accession to the EU in the 1990s – were also used by the EU in Turkey's accession bid. The criteria required the establishment of the legal and institutional structure of a well-functioning liberal democracy and market economy in candidate countries. An important element of this condition concerned civilian control over the military.

Accordingly, Turkey adopted vital political reforms during the early 2000s in order to be granted full membership. These reforms curbed the military's influence, among other things, by erasing the priorities of the National Security Council from the constitution and by maintaining numerical supremacy of civilians over soldiers in the same council. Constitutional amendments also removed the administrative organ of the NSC (the NSC General Secretary). Soldiers could no longer have representatives in the Council on Higher Education and the Higher Board of Radio and Television (Berksoy, 2013, p. 8).

Despite all the reforms undertaken between 2002 and 2005, the civilian control of the military was not achieved to the EU's standards. For instance, the Chief in General continued to report to the PM instead of the Minister of Defence. Nevertheless, the AKP managed to convince disparate groups in civil society and secular bureaucracy, and the military maintained their skepticism on account of the party's founding leaders' associations with political Islam (Yavuz, Koc, 2016, p. 136). The AKP broke the dominance of secularists and

Kemalists in the bureaucracy, which was seen as a traditional supporter of the military, or part of the establishment. Breaking the dominance of secularists in the armed forces was more challenging. In such a context, it was true that the military was not content with the election of a party with a background in political Islam. However, there were several phenomena that precluded the military intervention.

The reforms eradicated the legal basis of the military's influence. But supporting democratization packages and Turkey's accession to the EU would perfectly comply with the modern and Western-oriented ethos of the military (Heper, 2011). What is more, military intervention, or soldiers stubbornly resisting the EU accession process, would be too risky for the country because Turkey has already well integrated into the EU customs union and global markets. One reason for the military's endorsement of the EU accession process, albeit half-heartedly, may be that the EU accession process would seal the ethos of modern Turkey's goal of achieving the standards of the Western civilization. The possibility of joining the Western club, then, took precedence over the military's desire to control politics and national security. All in all, the military had to adapt to the new environment. In this context, the military had neither the need nor the desire to intervene in politics.

### **SLEDGEHAMMER-ERGENEKON**

In 2008, the Turkish public was shocked when allegations arose concerning the existence of a secret criminal organization, Ergenekon. It brought together people from various sectors of society, including journalists, academics, and soldiers. The members of Ergenekon would create turmoil in society, the accusations suggested, and the chaos would create legitimate grounds for the military to plot a coup. While the surprise effect of this case was still fresh, the second historic case, the Sledgehammer, appeared in the media. A large number of soldiers were charged with planning an intervention in 2003. Those plans were only revealed in 2010 when a newspaper, *Taraf*, first began publishing stories about

the plot with reference to some documents delivered to the newspaper in a suitcase. The public was stunned when the details came to light. For example, it was said that the plotters would create a chaotic atmosphere by bombing two mosques in Istanbul and shooting down a Turkish aircraft over the Aegean Sea. The officer corps, however, refuted accusations by suggesting that the document was simply a scenario being discussed in a military seminar.

The cases were taken very seriously by the public as they promised to reveal coup attempts, as well as uncovering past and present political criminal acts, which have been linked to the deep state, or a network of actors acting within the state (Aydınli, 2009). On the one hand, the era of military interventions could finally come to end when soldiers were sentenced; on the other if the secret elements acting within the state are removed, then it would be possible to create a more transparent state structure (Aydınli, 2012). Those hopes were quickly dashed when the police, working in harmony with some segments of the judiciary, started to select several reputed scientists, academics, and journalists at dawn. For instance, many condemned the way in which an elderly scientist and activist, Turkan Saylan, who had dedicated her life to the development of girls' education, was detained.

The evidence related to these cases was not completely convincing, but only few would dare to criticize the incoherencies and fallacies within the prosecutor's note from fear of being associated with the alleged Ergenekon terrorist organization (Jenkins, 2009). These suspicions did not preclude the imprisonment of a large number of officer corps and civil society actors, as well as a former Chief in General, İlker Basbug. The military was silent and never questioned the legitimacy of the judicial process. However, in July 2011, the entire senior command, including the Chief in General (Isik Kosaner) and the heads of the land forces, the navy, and the air forces, resigned in protest at the prosecution of officer corps. Kosaner said: "It has become impossible for me to continue in this high office, because I am unable to fulfil my responsibility to pro-

tect the rights of my personnel as the chief of general staff”<sup>3</sup>. The military endorsed the supremacy of the civilians.

When the conflict between the Gulenists and the AKP started in 2013, all the soldiers were acquitted in the early days of 2014. PM Erdogan and the supporters of the government claimed that Gulenists were planning an insidious plot against the military. The constitutional court would soon find that the cases were grounded on fabricated evidence. A political scientist describes these cases as functioning “to anesthetize the political reflexes of the military in order to push them into mode of defense” (Caliskan, 2017, p. 106–107).

### **GULEN MOVEMENT AND ON THE WAY TO THE FAILED COUP**

Since 2013, the Gulen movement was officially defined as a terrorist organization, *Fethullah Terör Organizasyonu (FETO)*. The media began exposing the activities of the Gulenists. The invasion of the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the police was no longer a secret. However, the extent and the power of the Gulenists in the army were underestimated, despite the military having long strived to prevent the growth of Gulenists in the army. Military intelligence had introduced stricter vetting procedures of military recruitment since the 1990s, the National Security Intelligence defined the Gulen movement as a national security threat in 2004, and the military intended to expel suspected Gulen sympathizers from the armed forces. These measures were ineffective. All of which begs the question: “How did Gulenists manage to infiltrate the most secular institution in the Republic?” (Yavuz, Koç, 2016, p. 137).

During the AKP period, expulsions from the military on the grounds of engaging in regressive activities (or *irtica*) dwindled to almost nothing. The Commander-in-Chief in office from 2002 to 2006, Hilmi Ozkok, played

a crucial role in preventing the expulsion of religious personnel<sup>4</sup>. Many members of the officer corps were not content with the encouraging attitude of Hilmi Özkök. Some officers intended to convince him to retire. This discontent with Özkök’s flexible attitude lasted throughout his tenure. However, there was no clear sign of any preparation for a military intervention. It was unnecessary and too risky to commit such an act at a time when Turkey had made giant steps forward along the road to EU membership and was still struggling with an economic crisis.

The alleged alliance between Erdogan and Gulen eventually became a power struggle, as Gulenists demanded more power (Yavuz, Koç, 2016). The struggle between them first emerged in 2012, when the secretary of National Intelligence, Hakan Fidan, was called by a prosecutor in Istanbul in connection with the government’s Kurdish policy. The government did not allow Fidan to be interrogated. Instead, it commenced a campaign against Gulenists. The government closed down private schools ran by the Gulen movement, took control over media affiliated with Gulenists, and imposed strict financial control over the companies owned by Gulen movement sympathizers. This campaign against the Gulenists aimed at eradicating their power, since education, media, and business formed three vital elements of the Gulen movement. Gulenists reacted quickly. In December 2013, Gulenist judiciary members and police started corruption probes against Erdogan’s family, four ministers and businessmen.

It was long suspected that the movement had an ambition to gradually infiltrate the state institutions. Those who supported the activities of the Gulen movement until the terrible July 15 event argue that the movement was initially a liberal faith organization concentrating on education. But it later evolved into a clandestine organization (Yavuz and Koc 2016: 137). Alternatively, others suggest that the secretive

3 BBC, 29 July 2011. Turkey: Military chiefs resign en masse. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-europe-14346325> (Accessed: 24.04.2017)

4 Jenkins G. Post-Putsch Narratives and Turkey’s Curious Coup. URL: <http://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/562-post-putsch-narratives-and-turkeys-curious-coup.html> (Accessed: 19.04.2017)

agenda has always been a part of the movement, but only a few knew of its real face.

The movement has an opaque, onion-like structure, composed of three layers<sup>5</sup>. At the core lies an inner circle of utterly dedicated members to whom the secret goals of the movement were revealed. The core circle was guiding and controlling the global reach of the movement in communication with Gulen. They were aware of their privileged position in the movement, but they also knew that secrecy was fundamental to achieve their loosely and mysteriously defined objective of delivering service (Hizmet) to a sacred ideal.

The second circle focused on education and worked to occupy bureaucratic positions within the state bureaucracy. They could do this not so secretly during the AKP period. However, Gulenists encountered strong resistance in one of those institutions: namely, the military. The second circle, which also includes members from business and the media, was also composed of loyal and pious Gulenists who were indoctrinated by the teachings of Gulen. However, they were less privileged in their access to Gulen and to the secrets of the movement.

The third circle was composed of sympathizers of the movement. They did not necessarily work for the purpose of Hizmet, but rather appreciated the façade of the movement. Many in the third group were not even religious. The movement approached celebrities to enhance their popularity and invited reputed names to engage in their activities.

Gulenists had meticulously but insidiously planned to penetrate into the bureaucracy and take control over the state from within. Gulenists initially achieved control over the police academy. Private tutorial schools and other private schools run by the movement, expropriated by the government after the failed coup of July 15, were crucial recruitment sites for the movement. Many of these students, having been indoctrinated by the Gulenist ideology of so-called *hizmet*, or service, held central bureaucratic or judicial positions in the state. Meanwhile, the movement directed its student followers, mainly from the middle or lower-middle classes, toward military high schools or military academies. Gulenists in the bureaucracy and the judiciary opened the way for cleansing secular or Kemalist officers from the military by plotting the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases<sup>6</sup>. Gulenists in the army rapidly replaced these officers and organized the failed coup attempt.

### The failed coup of 15 July

Since 2013, numerous Gulenists have already been cleansed from the police and judiciary (Milan 2016)<sup>7</sup>. The government was also planning to expel numerous Gulenists from the military before August 2016. There is no doubt that the coup attempt was organized by Gulenists, and the failed “kamikaze coup attempt” of Gulenists was a reaction to possible expulsions<sup>8</sup>. Some argue it is likely that

5 Şakul K. Bir SPIN şebeke örneği olarak Gülen cemaati: Sarımsak ve soğan demetlerinden bir öbek. URL: <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/kahraman-sakul/bir-spin-sebekte-ornegi-olarak-gulen-cemaati-sarimsak-ve-sogan-demetlerinden-bir-obek,15139> (Accessed: 21.04.2017)

6 Arango T. Turkish leader disowns trials that helped him tame military. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/world/europe/turkish-leader-disowns-trials-that-helped-him-tame-military.html> (Accessed: 17.04.2017)

7 See: Gurcan M. What went wrong with Turkey's WhatsApp coup. URL: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-basic-cause-was-premature-birth.html> (Accessed: 15.04.2017); Gurcan M. Why Turkey's coup didn't stand a chance. URL: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/turkey-kamikaze-coup-attempt-fails.html> (Accessed: 15.04.2017); Gursel K. Turkey's Failed Coup Reveals Army Within an Army. URL: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/turkey-coup-attempt-shows-army-within-army.html> (Accessed: 15.04.2017); Tol G. Mainzer M., Ekmekci, Z. Unpacking Turkey's failed coup: causes and consequences. 2016. URL: <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/unpacking-turkey-s-failed-coup-causes-and-consequences> (Accessed: 17.04.2017); Filkins D. Turkey's thirty-year coup: did an exiled cleric try to overthrow Erdoğan's government. URL: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/17/turkeys-thirty-year-coup> (Accessed: 17.04.2017)

8 Özkan, B. Turkey's lamikaze coup attempt: why now and what next? URL: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/behral-azkan/turkey-coup\\_b\\_11033324.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/behral-azkan/turkey-coup_b_11033324.html). (Accessed: 17.04.2017)

other groups also joined the Gulenists either to advance their careers, or because they were threatened to do so or merely wanted to topple the government.

The coup failed because it did not follow the chains of command. The military command did not support the coup; only a few field units supported the coup attempt. The commander of the first army in Istanbul, General Ümit Dündar, condemned the coup at an early stage. His statement made it clear that the coup attempt did not find support in the top echelons of the military. When he straightforwardly condemned the coup attempt, it was still not possible to hear news from the Chief in General, Hulusi Akar, and a group of other higher ranking officers. Later in the night, it became apparent that senior commanders were held captive in an airbase in Ankara. Amid such chaos, General Dündar invited Erdogan to Istanbul, promising to protect him from the coup *putschists*. He kept his promise. Erdogan's appearance on TV via Facetime on the night of July 15 and his call on citizens to resist the coup raised the morale of the people. For the first time in history, society stood against the soldiers in a coup attempt.

In addition, the failed coup was immediately condemned by all political parties. Several parliamentarians ran to the parliament building and stayed there when it was being bombed by a F16. It was obvious that the coup was doomed to fail as *putschists* could only mobilize a minor section of the army. The plotters started the coup attempt on Friday night at 22:30, earlier than was planned, by blockading the Bosphorus Bridge. They did not block Internet access or media broadcasts. They calculated to induce the sentiments of the opposition groups so as to create a larger social support for their attempt. The coup plotters presented themselves in a Kemalist image. They described themselves as the Peace at Home Council, a reference to Kemal Atatürk's motto, and in their list of grievances they gave the reason for the coup as being the government's anti-secular policies. But they should have known that bombing the national parliament would be seen as an appalling act by all sections of society. The use of violence by the

*putschists* against the people further reinforced the people's spirit of resistance. At least 242 people died and more than 1,000 were injured. All in all, it was apparent that the coup attempt was not well-thought out or well-implemented.

The coup attempt was brought under control during the early hours of July 16. The government was swift in its response. More than 42,000 military personnel, including high-ranking officers, have either been detained or dismissed due to their connections to the Gulen movement. It was the first time that a civilian government could expel soldiers without having to consult the council (Gurcan, 2017). Almost 40 percent of the Turkish army's generals and admirals were arrested; the Chief in General and the commanders of the land forces, navy, and air forces kept their positions. A huge number of people were also expelled from the judiciary, police, and education posts. The Gulenists' private schools and universities were closed down. The government took control over these schools along with the businesses that were run by Gulen's associates.

The government also took revolutionary steps in changing the legal structure of the civilian-military relations and the institutional and organizational structure of the military. A series of laws that were adopted in line with the EU accession bid brought significant changes in legal and institutional terms. The electoral victory of the AKP in 2007 following the Chief in General's disapproval of the AKP's presidential candidate, Abdullah Gul, was a notable turning point, as it gave the government crucial power vis-à-vis the military. The Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases weakened the institutional structure of the armed forces. But the implications after July 15 on the military cannot be compared with any of these events.

The government, adamant about maintaining civilian control of the army, took revolutionary steps in restructuring the army by decrees that were issued during the state of emergency (Gurcan, Gisclon, 2017). The Gendarmerie and the Coast Guard were taken under the full control of the interior ministry. Military high schools were closed. The pres-

ent military academies will be replaced by a National Defense University and will operate under the Ministry of Defense. The civilian members of the military have been increased in the Supreme Military Council. The Land Forces, Naval Forces and Air Force commands were brought under the control of the Ministry of Defense. The General Staff, according to the new constitutional amendment, will be represented by the presidency. Furthermore, the government has taken control of all of the military's business enterprises.

### Concluding Remarks

The officer corps is also now more diverse in terms of their religious commitment, ideas about secularism, and Turkey's foreign policy options. Gurcan (Gurcan, 2017), who conducted recent interviews with military personnel, helps us understand cleavages in the military. His findings suggest that military elites fall into three categories: (1) those who would not hesitate in exploiting the capabilities of the armed forces for their own personal benefits (*symbionts*); (2) those who merely try to advance their career opportunities without following a coherent worldview (pragmatists); and (3) those who want to change the institutional structure of the armed forces (*reformists*).

There are different worldviews among military elites such as conservatives, Atlantacists, neo-nationalists, and Eurasianists. Conservatives want to minimize the influence of globalization in the military. They are often religious and intend to restore a sphere of influence in Turkey's neighborhood by following a neo-Ottoman worldview. Conservatives are not interested in learning a foreign language or staying abroad for the purpose of their career development. Atlantacists adopt a worldview that places Turkey's future within NATO in close partnership with the US. In contrast to conservatives, they are better educated, and know foreign languages.

Neo-nationalists, like conservartives, are also critical of the implications of globalization in the military. But they want to preserve the traditonal Kemalist ideology and secular position of the armed forces. Eurasianists have a good command of foreign languages; however, they strive to follow a more independent foreign policy. This might mean adopting an anti-American attitude and moving closer to Russia when necessary (Gurcan, 2017, p. 9–10).

Many thought that the coup attempt would foster a Eurasianist turn in the military, which meant finding a new security alliance beyond that of the Western and NATO bloc. An immediate effect of the coup attempt was the rise of anti-Western and anti-American attitudes in society<sup>9</sup>. The government viewed the US, NATO, the EU and European countries (particularly Germany) as either plotters or supporters of the failed coup. They were harshly criticized by Erdogan and by the media that supports the AKP. In their account, Western countries do not want a powerful Turkey; therefore, a more independent foreign policy should be sought. Options involving greater cooperation with Russia and China have become more pronounced.

There will be both immediate and long-term implications of the radical changes that the Turkish government made to civilian-military relations and to the organizational structure of the armed forces. It is likely that the changes are meant to divide loyalties in the military by placing land forces, air forces, and the navy under the Ministry of Defense. Civilians intend to establish subjective control over the military. But they will do so at the expense of breaking the chain of command in the army. A related consequence of this is that the military may become more politicized as their promotions will be determined by politicians. Considering also that civilians lack the necessary technical knowledge, there may be some problems during the transition process.

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