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Faculty of Political Science and Public Administration
School of Economics and Political Science

The Changing Political Role of the Turkish Military since the Advent of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)

By

Amarandi Penelope Barrett

MA in Southeast European Studies
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
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Abstract

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The Turkish military has had a large role in Turkish politics since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. It has seen itself, and has been seen by the Turkish public, as a guardian of the Republic and its guiding principles, especially those of secularism and republicanism. This guardianship role has led not only to a high degree of military involvement in politics, but also to four interventions, which overthrew the sitting Turkish government in times when the military deemed it unable or unwilling to protect the values of the nation. However, the military's power has gradually decreased since the beginning of the 21st century, due to two factors: pressure to comply with the political criteria necessary for membership in the European Union, which requires civilian control and oversight of the military, and the emergence of a strong political party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has increased its own power at the expense of the Turkish Armed Forces.

Table of Contents:

I. Introduction
  A. Hypothesis
  B. Overview
II. History of the Military's Involvement in Politics
I. Military Interventions
  A. 1960 coup
  B. 1971 coup
  C. 1980 coup
  D. 1997 coup
III. How Has The Military Influenced Politics?
  A. Institutional power
    1. National Security Council (NSC)
    2. State Security Courts
    3. Other departments established by the General Staff
      a) Working Groups
  B. Informal power
IV. Turkey and the EU
V. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) Comes to Power
  A. Legal/formal/institutional changes
    1. NSC
    2. Military loses seats in the Council of Higher Education and High Audio-Visual Board
    3. 2010 constitutional amendments
      a) Rights of political parties and politicians, appointments of judges
      b) Military courts and the trying of military personnel
    4. Article 35 amendment
    5. The military's reaction to EU-guided reforms
  B. Informal/non-institutional changes
  C. De-securitization policies
    1. Political Islam
    2. PKK
    3. Issues with neighbors
  D. Ergenekon and Sledgehammer
    1. The investigations and trials
    2. Loss of public support
  E. 2016 attempted coup
VI. How Real/Final Are These Changes?
VII. Conclusion
VIII. Bibliography

I. Introduction

A. Hypothesis

The AKP has increased its own political power by weakening the Turkish Armed Forces' (TAF) ability to involve itself in politics through a combination of EU-mandated reforms that limited the TAF's institutional power, and accusations of coup attempts which have damaged public perception of the military and limited its informal power.

B. Overview

Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the military has seen itself as the protector of the official state ideology of Kemalism— the ideology produced by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish republic— which promoted secularism, republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism. The military sees itself as the protector of the secular Turkish Republic, from not only foreign threats but also internal threats, particularly those of nationalism—in the form of Kurdish separatism—and the Islamist movement (Jenkins 2001, 31). The Turkish military has historically been extremely popular with the Turkish public, which holds the military in high regard and sees it as representative of the values of the nation. Because of this, the perception the military has of itself as the protector of the nation and of Kemalism has been publicly supported and has a public mandate (Jenkins 2001, 17-18). In surveys, the Turkish military has consistently been the most trusted institution in the country; in 1999 and 2000, 86.2% of those polled said they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in the military, compared to 68.7% who had confidence in the Turkish police, and 45.4% in the government (Inglehart et al. 2014).

Officers trained in military academies and high schools are taught to hold Kemalist values in the highest regard, and to identify Turkish patriotism as inseparable from Kemalism, and particularly secularism. Ironically, the Turkish military's role in politics is incompatible with the norm in Western liberal democracies, and so Kemalism's goal of Westernization and, therefore,

by extension, entrance into the European Union, has been simultaneously the goal of, and at odds with, the goals and values of the Turkish military.

Since 2002, when the Justice and Development Party came into power under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, there began a process of decreasing the power of the military in Turkish politics, perhaps initially to increase the chance of satisfying the Copenhagen Criteria (the political, economic and democratic criteria necessary for a candidate country's entrance into the European Union), but increasingly to strengthen AKP's power at the expense of the military. The limitations to the TAF's power began as a series of constitutional reforms prompted by attempts to join the EU, and limiting the military's power that it had exercised through the National Security Council, military courts, and through laws defining its role as a guardian of Turkey and a protector against both internal and external threats. Once the military's power had been sufficiently limited, AKP loyalists in the police and judiciary began investigations into alleged coup plans from 2003 onwards. The investigations into, and arrests of, thousands of high and low-ranking military personnel followed, and severely damaged public opinion of the TAF. AKP used these investigations as an excuse to purge the military of officers critical of the party and appoint officers more tolerant of AKP and Islam. AKP also began a process of enacting structural changes to the army, which brought the TAF increasingly under civilian control and oversight and decreased its ability to act independently in politics.

II. History of the military's involvement in politics

The military has historically had a special role in Turkish politics, reaching back to the early days of the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor to modern Turkey. In fact, the Ottoman Empire started out as simply an army and eventually evolved into an empire, which lasted from the 14th to the 20th century and at its zenith controlled large parts of southeastern Europe, central Europe,

the coast of northern Africa, the Caucasus, western Asia, and the Middle East. The ability of the empire to enlarge itself and then to control these vast lands, or at the very least to extract taxes from them, depended on the power of the Ottoman military (Hale 1994, 2). When the power of the military began to wane starting in the mid-18th century, the decline of the empire began. There were extensive territorial losses throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries, which culminated in the loss of all the territories except modern day Turkey after the end of the First World War (Howard 2016).

Towards the final century or so of the Ottoman Empire the military went through massive reforms in order to modernize and bring it into competition with the other great powers at the time. One of the main ways this was done was through the creation of Western-style military schools, which helped to produce military personnel who were Westernized in that they were secular, reformist, and often revolutionary (Knudsen 2005). In this way, the Ottoman military towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries became the most modern and secular institution within Ottoman society. This trend of modernization and secularity within the military continued after the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, under General Mustafa Kemal, or Ataturk, who became the nations' first president. Ataturk continued with the modernization of the military and furthered this with reforms in all aspects of Turkish society with the goal of establishing a modern, secular, and Westernized state. Though a former general and war hero, Ataturk separated the institution of the military from politics by requiring military personnel to retire their positions before seeking political office. Despite this, the esteemed regard military personnel were held in meant that for the first few decades of the Turkish Republic, politics were dominated by former soldiers, generals, and officers.

Ataturk led the new nation from its independence until his death in 1938, after which his party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), remained in power until 1950. After 1950, power was held by the first successful opposition party of the Turkish Republic, the Democrat Party (DP). The next half century would see four interventions of the military.

III. Military Interventions

When has the military perceived a threat to either the principles of Kemalism or to the integrity of the Turkish territory and decided that the civilian government was unable or unwilling to safeguard the republic from these threats? There have been four large-scale interventions of the Turkish military in politics since 1923. These interventions all led to the resignation of the civilian governments in place; two through outright military coups (1960, 1980) and two by the application by the military of public or behind-the-scenes pressure on the government (1971, 1997).

A. 1960 coup

For a period of about 30 years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the government was led and run by former officers and generals. However, the Turkish military as an institution was weak, underfunded, politically inactive, and outdated. The tide began to turn in the 1950s after the Korean War, when Turkey became a NATO member and funds began to enter the country with the aim of the modernization of the Turkish military. This enabled the military to travel and for military personnel to gain firsthand experience of the armed forces of other nations.

Resentment began to form among Turkish officers and soldiers, especially as to the treatment of the military by Adnan Menderes, who became the Prime Minister after the death of Ataturk with the election of the Democrat Party to power in 1950. His purging of the military high command, combined with his refusal to raise military salaries or improve barrack living

conditions, created a widespread sense of discontent within the armed forces. This was compounded with Menderes' increased authoritarianism over the course of the 1950s. In 1960, a group of 37 officers overthrew the government, justifying their involvement as necessary to prevent the overthrow of democracy by the Democrat Party and the possibility of a subsequent civil war. The military maintained control until a civilian government was reinstated in October of 1961 (Jenkins 2001, 35-37).

Before the reestablishment of civilian rule, the military organized themselves within the government as the newly created National Unity Committee, made up of 38 military commanders. These individuals gave up their military positions to take part in this new government apparatus and greatly liberalized the Turkish constitution. (The National Unity Committee was dissolved after the 1961 elections of a civilian government.) The new constitution better protected individual rights and created a more well-developed checks-and-balances system to control the power of the executive. It set up the National Security Council (NSC), and also instituted a system of proportional representation, which made it possible for smaller political parties to gain seats in government— something that would lead to a series of weak, coalition governments in Turkey for decades (Hale 1994, 122-124).

B. 1971 coup

Civil unrest built up in Turkey during the 1960s, and by the beginning of the 1970s, it seemed that civil war, as a result of conflict between militant right-wing nationalist groups and leftist university students, was not far off. This led to the second involvement of the Turkish military in politics, with the claim that the civilian government, led by Suleyman Demirel, was too weak to prevent the violence between the left and right. Unlike the 1960 coup, the government overthrow that occurred in March of 1971 materialized in the form of a public memorandum by the Turkish Armed Forces that requested the immediate resignation of the current government, with the

threat of direct military intervention if this did not take place. Demirel's government resigned the same day (Hale 1994).

The subsequent civilian governments that formed were weak coalitions, which proved unable to mend the fighting between factions of left and right. The continued civil strife, combined with the rise of political Islam, led to the third involvement and second outright military coup in Turkish history, in 1980.

C. 1980 coup

The 1980 coup was better organized and had clearer goals than either of the two military interventions that came before it. The military took over the government in September and did not return power to civilian hands for three years. The coup lasted much longer than any of the interventions that had occurred before. However, it was also more successful, as it had three specific and agreed-upon goals: to end the political and civil strife and bloodshed between the left and right, to fix the economy, and to reinstate a democratically elected civilian government, which would be both successful and long lasting (Hale 1994, 247).

In 1982, a third constitution was created and put in place. This new constitution helped institutionalize the role of the military in politics by further strengthening the NSC (Knudsen 2005, 9), and additionally, changed the Turkish government from a presidential to a parliamentary democracy. It also attempted to fix the issue of fragmented coalition governments that had arisen with the adoption of proportional representation by establishing as a requirement a minimum 10% percent of the national vote in order to gain entrance into parliament (Hale 1994, 259). This made it more difficult for small peripheral parties to enter government and wreak havoc on the stability of government coalitions.

D. 1997 coup

After the reinstatement of civilian control in 1983, the Turkish military once again distanced itself from politics. This disengagement continued into the mid 1990s, until the rise of a political Islamic party in the form of Necmettin Erbakan's Refah, or Welfare Party. (Interestingly, the rise of political Islam can be seen as a possible result of decisions made by the Turkish military in the 1982 constitution to introduce compulsive religious education in schools; the reasoning behind this being the assumption that if the young generation were not religious, they would fill this void with another ideology—communism or fascism (Hale 1994, 299)). The Welfare Party won 21% of the national vote in the 1995 elections, and the party had as one of its goals the establishment of an 'Islamic order', which threatened the Turkish state ideology of secularism. The fourth, and final, successful Turkish military intervention in politics occurred in 1997, resulting in the eventual resignation of Erbakan as Prime Minister, and then, in 1998, with the dissolving of the Welfare Party. In this intervention the civilian government was immediately replaced with another civilian government. The 1997 coup is commonly referred to as Turkey's first 'post-modern' coup because rather than using overt external power to force Erbakan's party from power, the military instead opted for subtle behind-the-scenes pressure that increased over time until Erbakan willingly resigned (Videt 2005, 10).

What is interesting about these four military interventions is that, as promised, the military did indeed return power to civilian hands within a reasonable amount of time. This is at odds with what generally occurs in countries that experience military coups. Often a swift return to civilian rule is promised, but the military junta resists this return for as long as possible. According to Christopher Clapham and George Philip in *The Political Dilemmas of Military Regimes* (1985), this can be explained by three factors. First, the high degree of unity and adherence to command structure and discipline within the Turkish army; second, the military's separateness from civil society, which is extremely pronounced due to the system of military education that

separates military personnel from civilians and has resulted in the creation of a separate military class; and, finally, the existence and relatively high strength of autonomous political organizations—in particular political parties, but also including non-party organizations such as unions and businesses. These three factors have led to the position of the Turkish military as a guardian of democracy and secular principles rather than as a constantly politically engaged and entangled force (Hale 1994, 316-318). Ataturk's attempts to separate the military from politics were, for the most part, successful, and very few soldiers choose to go into politics after retirement from the TAF. The military can be described as a "reluctant interventionist" (Jenkins 2001, 34) that has only become involved in coups when it deemed it absolutely necessary, and even then saw the coups as temporary emergency situations that were only to exist until a functioning government could be put in place.

IV. How has the military influenced politics?

A. Institutional power

The military exerts influence on government and policy through both formal and informal methods. In terms of formal institutionalized power, the military influences policy through its membership in the National Security Council. Informally, the military also exerts influence through expressions of opinions, both publicly and in private. The NSC is more frequently used when it comes to areas in which the military plays a major role in policy formation. Informal methods are used more commonly for ideological issues, or if the civilian government has failed to act or respond to an issue deemed important by the military with sufficient speed (Jenkins 2001, 49).

1. National Security Council (NSC)

The official platform through which the military exercises political power is the National Security Council. The NSC is, in theory, an advisory body that is made up of both civilian and military

personnel, which discusses issues of national security and forms policy guidelines. However, the Turkish constitution defines ‘national security’ so expansively that the NSC is free to give advisory opinions on virtually every aspect of Turkish policy, ranging from foreign policy to the economy (Jenkins 2001, 46). The NSC’s development can be understood through four phases: the era of the Supreme Defense Assembly (1933-1949), the era of the National Defense Supreme Council (1949-1962), the era of the NSC under the 1961 constitution (1962-1983), and the era of the NSC under the 1982 constitution. The latter can then be further broken up into three additional periods: 1983-2003, 2003-2018, and 2018 to the present day. The changes that took place within the NSC from 2003 onwards will be discussed in a further section.

The first era, which began in 1933, established the Supreme Defense Assembly that was made up of the President, the Prime Minister, the Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces, and various members of the Council of Ministers. The purpose of the Supreme Defense Assembly was to discuss and plan national mobilization as well as to decide the duties of the different ministries.

The second era began in 1949 with the establishment of the National Defense Supreme Council. The Council was enlarged from the previous Supreme Defense Assembly, and now included the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defense and Commander of the TAF, but also the Ministers of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Civil Works, Economy, among others depending on what needed to be discussed during the meeting. During times of war, the General Commander of Warfare Forces was also included on the Council. The duties of the Council were to formulate national defense policy, prepare mobilization plans, and to advise on issues related to defense of the homeland. Meetings occurred once a month.

In 1961, Law No. 129 under the 1961 constitution officially established the National Security Council. The members were the President, the Prime Minister, the Commander of the

TAF, the State and Deputy Prime Ministers, the Ministers of National Defense, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Transportation and Labor, as well as the commanders of the armed forces. The position of Secretary-General and its office was created, although the Secretary-General was not given the power to vote. The NSC's duties included preparing national defense policies, discussing issues of national security, formulating plans for dealing with them, and informing the council of Ministers of the NSC's opinions.

The 1982 constitution altered the makeup of the NSC to give more power to the military. The new makeup of the council was the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief of the General Staff, the Ministers of National Defense, Internal Affairs, and Foreign Affairs, the Commanders of the Land, Naval, and Air Forces, and the General Commander of the Gendarmerie (Article 118 of 1982 Constitution). Its duty was to identify national security issues, to formulate policy, to ensure implementation of this policy, as well as to ensure maintenance of the "constitutional order…national unity and integrity…around the national ideals and values…of Atatürk" (MGK 2018).

The NSC's views were submitted to the Council of Ministers in the form of decisions, which were to be given priority consideration by the Ministers. Officially, these 'decisions' were voted on, but in reality, they were arrived at by consensus. Because a consensus method was used, the numerical makeup of the differing parties (president, civilian, and military) was not of great importance, and the military's power in the NSC came not from its members but from the respect that was given to the military by the other parties in the council. Officially, the civilian government or president had the power to block proposals by the military members of the council by refusing to agree to a policy decision, but in reality, the military was rarely challenged in the NSC. This is due to a combination of factors, including knowledge of the ability and willingness of the military to become involved in unseating governments, but also because of politi-

cians' existence in a society that brought up its citizens holding the TAF in the highest regard; this made it very difficult psychologically for politicians to challenge members of the TAF (Jenkins 2001, 52). It was, therefore, more common for the civilian government to simply delay implementation of policy decisions made by the NSC. In these cases when the government failed to implement military policy suggestions, the military would generally wait and bring the issue up again at later meetings, or, if it deemed government inaction a serious threat to national security, would resort to informal methods in order to pressure government (Jenkins 2001). These informal methods will be discussed in a later section.

2. State Security Courts

The State Security Courts, or Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri (DGM), were established under Article 143 of the 1982 Turkish Constitution. The jurisdiction of these specialized courts was limited to criminal and political cases involving state integrity, democratic order, or cases involving state security, internal or external (Joseph R. Crowley Program 1998). The court membership was made up of "a president, two regular and two substitute members, one public prosecutor, and a sufficient number of deputy public prosecutors". Two of these members—one regular and one substitute— were to be military judges (1982 Turkish Const. art. 143). These judges continued to receive their salaries from the military, and were still subject to military rules and discipline, and were, therefore, by default under military control. This was seen as a failure of the Turkish judicial system to meet international standards of an independent and impartial judiciary.

In 1991, these courts began to deal also with terror crimes defined by the Turkish Law No. 3713 (Law to Fight Terrorism). This law's broad definition of terrorism ("any act done…with the aim of changing the characteristics of the Republic…its political, legal, social, secular and economic system, damaging the indivisible unity of the state with its territory and

nation…or damaging the internal and external security of the State, public order, or general health”), also includes an anti-propaganda clause. This law’s broad definition of terror meant that the State Security Courts saw cases involving murder, but also dealt with cases in which the defendants were journalists, politicians, and human-rights activists (Human Rights Watch 1999).

Several cases tried in these State Security Courts resulted in cases at the European Court of Human Rights, and in 1998, in Incal vs. Turkey, the European Court of Human Rights found that the existence of a military judge in these courts casted doubt upon the independence of the court and, therefore, violated Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights—the right to a fair trial (Case of Incal v. Turkey 1998). This ruling led in 1999 to the removal of military judges from these courts, and in 2004, under AKP, the abolishment of the State Security Courts altogether. They were replaced with the so-called Heavy Penal Courts, which continued to be criticized for the same issues the State Security Courts had faced (Amnesty International 2006).

3. Other departments established by the general staff

a) Working groups

The Turkish military also exercises institutional power through working groups, which are made up of officers and provide expertise to the Turkish General Staff (TGF) in order to manage military exercises or military training, but also for the TGF to compose policy documents and briefs for discussion by the NSC. These working groups are created on an ad-hoc basis and can be dissolved or formed at any time, and for the most part are non-political, although a few are highly political— for example, the Western Working Group.

The Western Working Group, or Bati Çalisma Grubu (BCG), was a secret military intelligence body that functioned from its creation in the months leading up to the 1997 coup through at least the first decade of the 21st century. It was set up under the auspices of the NSC, specifically through the orders of the then Chief of General Staff Ismail Karadyi. Its operations func-

tioned out of an office at the Higher Education Board (YÖK). The purpose of the BCG was to seek out potential Islamic fundamentalism through the monitoring of the religious affiliations and ideological leanings of politicians, journalists, bureaucrats, civil servants, military personnel, personnel in trade, labor unions and higher education institutions, among others. These individuals were monitored in order to guard against persons who could be or become potential threats to secularism within Turkey (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002; hereafter IRBC). Records kept by the group and submitted to the NSC were used to fire numerous employees in both the public and private sectors (Sanli 2006). The BCG was instrumental in the ousting of Erbakan's Islamist Welfare Party government during the 1997 coup and was allegedly inactive for a few years before being mobilized again in 2003 (Today's Zaman 2010).

Also worth mentioning is the Eastern Working Group, or Dogu Calisma Grubu, which was formed in 1993 and functioned along the same lines as the BCG but whose purpose was instead to monitor sympathizers to Kurdish nationalism (Aknur 2012, 217). Other political working groups include ones to manage various foreign and domestic policy issues; for example, issues pertaining to Greece and Cyprus, the United States, EU membership, the mafia and the underworld (Jenkins 2001, 50).

B. Informal power

Along with institutional mechanisms, the Turkish military also exerts influence through informal mechanisms. These include official statements, public speeches, briefings, and on- or off-the-record interviews with journalists. The official statements are usually given by high-ranking members of the Turkish General Staff. Content-wise, these statements generally concern reiterations or reassurances of official military stances on domestic issues. The goal of these statements is to pressure the civilian government to act on an issue by galvanizing public support for the military's platform in cases where the elected government has been slow, or reluctant, to act in

an NSC recommended direction (Jenkins 2001, 53). These informal methods give the military power because the public's esteem for the military means that what military officials say publicly is treated as important by the public and is often successful in spurring the government into action (2001, 54).

V. Turkey and the EU

Turkey's attempts to gain entry into the European Union began in 1959 with the country's application to the predecessor to the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC). Associate membership was granted several years later, though Turkey was never granted full membership into the EEC. When the EEC morphed into the Economic Community (EC) in 1993, Turkey was granted economic partnership, and at the end of 1999 Turkey gained candidate member status for the European Union. In order to qualify for full membership in the EU, Turkey was asked to meet the Copenhagen Criteria, a set of standards regarding democracy, rule of law, human rights, and various other economic and political criteria, that all EU candidate countries are required to meet before they are granted membership.

The Copenhagen Criteria, which were created by the European Council in 1993, require that a country has the proper functioning institutions to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, minority protections, and a functioning market economy before being granted membership into the European Union. The EU identified many areas in which Turkey was not meeting these standards, including in human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association, the rights of minorities—especially the Kurdish minority—as well as the independence of the judiciary (Emerson 2004).

One of the primary issues the EU had with Turkey's political system was the political power of the military within the country. In mature, consolidated Western democracies, the mili-

tary is subordinated to the civilian government. This was not the case for Turkey, as the TAF had significant independent power over foreign and domestic security issues, as well as over its own affairs, such as its budget and promotion process. The European Union, in all of its progress reports between 1998 and 2010 on Turkey's advancement towards meeting the Copenhagen Criteria, complained about the TAF's and the NSC's influence on Turkish foreign and domestic policy. In the earlier years, from 1998 until around 2002, these complaints or critiques concentrated on the institutionalized power mechanisms of the military, such as the NSC and the fact that the Turkish Chief of Staff is subordinate to the Prime Minister rather than to the Minister of Defense like in most democratic nations. In later years, once some reforms—mostly to the NSC—had been made, the progress reports' attention turned to focus on the informal power of the military, particularly the speeches and other public expressions of opinion that high-ranking military members continued to carry out. The progress reports also began to critique the lack of budgetary oversight of the civilian government over the TAF (Aknur 2012, 226-229).

VI. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) Comes to Power

AKP came to power in November 2002 with 34.2% of the vote. In the next legislative elections, the party won 47%, and two years later this number increased to nearly 50% (Aknur 2012, 234). This was a huge change for a country that for decades had been run by weak, fragmented, coalition governments. Historically, this lack of support for elected governments had enabled the military to take on more power. The public had put their trust in the military to uphold standards that they did not trust the civilian government to uphold. A party winning nearly half of the vote in its first three elections was unheard of since the middle of the 20th century in Turkey.

AKP is an offspring of the Islamist Welfare Party, which was banned by the Turkish courts in 1997 after the fourth coup. In 2003, shortly after the election of AKP, Chief of the Gen-

eral Staff Hilmi Ozkok warned the government that another military intervention was not out of the question and that AKP would be wise to not push the secular boundaries of the Turkish constitution. However, AKP in the first years of its being elected expressed a firm commitment to the secular principles of Kemalism, as well as for EU membership. This quelled some of the military's anxieties about the election of a religious conservative party, although the TAF remained skeptical about the underlying goals of AKP (Aknur 2012, 234). AKP was well aware that the last Islamic party in power in Turkey had been ousted by a military coup and then banned by the courts. It behaved so, keeping its distance from non-secular politics. Even when AKP was first established, Erdogan stressed that the party members were not Islamists, but were rather Muslim democrats (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008).

Both AKP and the military were committed to full membership in the European Union. AKP's support for membership reflected public support, while the military's support from it stemmed from Kemalism and Atatürk's commitment to the West. Membership in the EU can be seen as a final goal of Kemalism, and thereby, the Westernization of Turkey. Ironically, membership in the EU could only come at the expense of military power in Turkey, but despite this, high-ranking Turkish generals supported the cause and were willing to give up some of their institutionalized powers in order to make the military more subordinate to the civilian government and thus meet the Copenhagen Criteria.

In order to come closer to meeting the Copenhagen Criteria of democratic control of the armed forces, AKP passed ten total reform packages between 2001 and 2004. Two of these were constitutional reforms, in 2001 and 2004, and the remaining eight were legislative packages. These narrowed the power of the military by limiting the power of the NSC, the State Security Courts, and increasing budgetary oversight of the TAF by the civilian government (Aknur 2012,

226-228). The following section will overview the particular limits put on TAF's formal and informal political power.

A. Legal/formal/institutional changes

1. NSC

One of the first things tackled in Turkey through EU membership-motivated reforms was the National Security Council. Progress reports by the EU had critiqued the NSC's strong influence over the Turkish political process and civilian government (Turan and Gürsoy 2014). The 2001 constitutional reform specifically applied reforms to Article 118 of the Turkish Constitution, thereby limiting the power of the NSC in several ways. The Deputy Prime Ministers and the Minister of Justice were given seats on the NSCs so that civilian members outnumbered military members on the council. The role of the NSC was reduced to purely advisory, and the decisions of the council were to be regarded as 'advisory decisions' or recommendations that the Council of Ministers would evaluate rather than give priority consideration (Bardakci 2018).

In 2003, a legislative reform package reduced the frequency of NSC meetings from once a month to once every two months, and the TAF's commander was no longer authorized to call for extra meetings. The role of the Secretary-General of the NSC was limited and the position was no longer only available to military officers. Additionally, the reform package limited the NSC's access to civilian agencies that had previously provided the NSC with both confidential and non-confidential information in the form of ministerial documents, private legal documents, and documents of public institutions. Neither was the NSC any longer authorized to conduct investigations under the council's initiative (Bardakci 2018). The reform package also decreased the NSC's budget by 60% (CMI Working Paper 2016) and increased the transparency of the TAF's budget by giving parliament authority to audit the budget of the military. Another reform

package, passed in 2004, further increased civilian control over the military's budget (Anur 2012, 228-229).

2. Military loses seats in the Council of Higher Education and High Audio-Visual Board

Along with limitations imposed on the NSC, the reform packages passed by the AKP government in the first five years of the 2000s also narrowed the military's access to several state institutions. Importantly, the military lost its seats on both the Council of Higher Education and the High Audio-Visual Board. The Council of Higher Education is responsible for supervising universities in Turkey, and the military's seat on that board allowed them to ensure the secular character of the universities in the country. The High Audio-Visual Board is responsible for supervising Turkish radio, television, and other media services, and ensuring that they comply with standards of freedom of expression and information, offer a diversity of opinion, and do not damage public interests (Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities 2017). Again, the military's seat on this board ensured a high level of secularity in Turkish media. The loss of these seats severely limited the military's influence in the administration of university systems and regulating the media.

Since the military's loss of its seat, the High-Audio Visual Board has taken to intervening when TV channels have not upheld certain levels of Islamic morality. Television, and, since 2019, online broadcasts, censor anything considered to be against Turkish values, including profanity, "nudity, alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use [and] gory violence" (Farooq, 2019). In 2013, a private TV channel was fined when a competitor on a game show referred to herself hypothetically having an affair (Hurriyet Daily News, 2013). Critics of this censorship have called

it an attempt by AKP to push Islamism and Islamic values onto all Turkish citizens (Farooq, 2019).

3. 2010 constitutional amendments

In 2010, a referendum was held on 26 planned amendments to the Turkish Constitution. AKP stated that the amendments aimed to bring the constitution more in line with European standards, and the referendum was passed with 58% of the total turnout of 78% voting in favor of it. The EU stated their support for the amendments. The 26 amendments included several involving individual and human rights, specifically the rights of children, orphans, the elderly, and the disabled, as well as rights to privacy and movement. But others involved the judiciary, the military, access to courts, and the rights of political parties and politicians (Yackley 2010). While AKP stressed that the amendments would strengthen rule of law in the country and bring it closer to EU standards, opponents to the amendments and to AKP argued that the human-rights based amendments were only included to distract from the other changes which would enable the erosion of Turkey's secular nature by allowing AKP to control the judicial branch and the military.

a) Rights of political parties and politicians, appointments of judges

Article 84, for example, made it harder to disband political parties, requiring a vote of two-thirds, rather than three-fifths, majority in the Constitutional Court (Hill 2010). It also made it illegal to ban politicians from politics if their political party is banned by the courts. This issue was of high importance to AKP, who in 2008 had faced the prospect of being banned as a political party when a request to close down AKP on charges of anti-secular activities was sent to the Constitutional Court. If the court had ruled against AKP, the party would have been removed from government and 71 of its members banned from politics for five years. The banning of the party failed by one vote, although all but one of the judges agreed that AKP "had become a center for

anti-secular activities" (Albayrak 2013). AKP was forced to pay a fine of $20 million (Jenkins 2009, 63).

Another amendment to the constitution gave the elected government more control over the appointment of judges. Opponents argued that this would enable AKP to fill the courts with Islamist judges who would not be committed to upholding secularity (The Economist 2010).

b) Military courts and the trying of military personnel

Amendments to Articles 145, 156, and 157 made it so that military personnel charged with committing crimes against the state and constitution would no longer be tried in military courts. Instead, they would face trial in civilian courts. The amendments also banned the practice of trying civilians accused of committing crimes against the security of the state in military courts; only military personnel could now be tried in military courts. This significantly limited the jurisdiction of military courts. Worth mentioning is that the military's power in the judiciary had already been limited; as of 1999, the military member had been removed from the State Security Courts, and in 2004, the State Security Courts were abolished altogether.

Perhaps most importantly, it repealed the article that offered protection for members of the military who had been involved in the 1980 military coup from being tried (Yackley 2010). The repealing of this article would enable the imprisonment of hundreds of military personnel during the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations and trials (these will be discussed in a further section).

Additionally, military staff who had been dismissed by the Military High Council were now authorized to submit their dismissal for judicial review. This had been a point of conflict between AKP and the TAF since 2003, when the military expressed its dissatisfaction with AKP appointing dismissed officers to positions in the bureaucracy (IRBC 2002). Before 2010, the Military High Council would dismiss anyone who was suspected of having less than a strongly

secular ideology; between 1995 and 2000, over 700 officers were dismissed from the TAF for a variety of reasons, including having Islamist sympathies (Jenkins 2001, 28), being involved in extreme forms of Islam, and taking part in religious activity (IRBC 2002). Military personnel who were accused of this were not permitted to defend themselves in the military court, nor were they permitted to appeal their dismissal in other courts.

The new allowance of appeals for officers suspected of having Islamist sympathies was significant because not only were military personnel who had been dismissed for being suspected of or accused of this act now harder to dismiss, but this opened the potential for the possibility of infiltration of Islamist officers into the TAF, which before had been staunchly secular and was able to defend and maintain this secularity by dismissing or refusing entry to those suspected of not being so. Until the 1990s, candidates for military schools were vetted so rigorously that even having a relative who was politically involved or suspected of having Kurdish or Islamist sympathies was enough to bar a candidates' entrance into the school. Barred candidates claimed that during the application process they were asked to show the military schools a photograph of their family, and if the parents or a sibling was seen to be religious (for example, if a mother or sister wore headscarf, or if a brother or father had a beard) they were not admitted into the school (Jenkins 2001, 29).

4. Article 35 amendment

Article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law (TAFISL) is what gave the TAF its guardianship role over the country and justified its taking action in the perceived best interest of Turkey. The law stated that the TAF's duty is to "protect and preserve the Turkish homeland and the Turkish Republic". Article 85/1 of the Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Directive (TAFISD) defined the role of the TAF as to protect the republic, with "arms when necessary,

against internal and external threats" (Mevzuat 1961). These laws had been used in the past to justify military coups, and EU progress reports had criticized the potential of these laws to give the TAF the authority to involve itself in politics without the consent of the civilian authorities. In 2013, this article was amended. Instead of giving the military the duty to protect Turkey from internal and external threats, the amendment limited the military's duty to protecting Turkey from external threats and clarified that these duties should be performed in a way determined by the Turkish parliament. AKP claimed that this amendment was meant to prevent the Turkish military from potential future "exploitations" of TAFISL and TAFISD (Anadolu Agency 2013).

5. The military's reaction to EU-guided reforms

The TAF had a mixed reaction to these reforms. In *A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals and an End to the Coup Era in Turkey* (2009), Ersel Aydinli identifies two primary groups within the TAF since the beginning of these EU-accession guided reforms. The first is a "traditional conservative majority group", the second a "smaller, more progressive group". These two groups differ not in their ideals or vision for the country so much as in their approach to reforms. The majority group is more cautious about Turkey's ability to deal with problems without the guidance of the military. This group believes that the country is not ready to put complete power into the hands of the civilian government, and that standards of secularism will not be upheld due to the "ideological and social fragmentation" within the country (589). They also point to security issues, like those with the PKK, and say that the complete subordination of the military to the civilian government could be disastrous for the territorial integrity of Turkey. The progressive group, on the other hand, thinks that Turkey is ready for democratization and acceptance into the West and is ready to give up their power to meet EU standards (2009).

Despite the conservative group being the majority, however, the Chief of Staffs since 2002 have been more progressive. Hilmi Özkök, who served from 2002 to 2006 (and became more progressive after 2003), Yasar Büyükanit (2006 to 2009), and Ilker Basbug (2008 to 2010), all supported EU reforms, cooperated with the civilian government, and expressed their commitment to respecting the authority of the civilian government in domestic and foreign security issues. This support may have been largely due to a reluctance for the TAF to be viewed as an obstacle to EU membership, which would likely have damaged the military's popularity (Bardakçi 2018, 11). However, many lower-ranking military personnel did voice their criticism for the many reforms, and it is generally assumed that the middle-ranking officers are, and have generally been, more radically secularist than those in the top echelons of the TAF (Videt 2005, 14).

B. Informal/non-institutional changes

Despite the military's loss of most of its institutional power throughout the first decade of the 2000s, it still managed to maintain some influence through its informal power. The majority of this power manifested itself in the form of speeches given by high-ranking members of the TAF. These speeches focused on both domestic and foreign issues, for example, reforms AKP enacted on higher education, as well as security issues such as the Cyprus issue. Unlike the norm in the EU and other Western countries, the positions taken in these statements were not always cleared with the government beforehand, were often given before the government had even developed an official position on the issue, or, frequently, were in direct conflict with government positions (Matos 2013). The EU, somewhat satisfied by the formal changes to the political reach of the military, now focused its attention on the military's informal power. EU progress reports continuously criticized the military for expressing its opinion in public speeches, and in 2005 the

progress report stressed that military speeches should be concerned only with military matters, and that they should always be made with the consent and leadership of the elected government (Aknur 2012, 230).

The military gradually began to lose its access to speeches and to press conferences; this loss was exhibited most pronouncedly in 2007, when the General Staff's opposition to the election of AKP's candidate, Abdullah Gül, to the presidency, took the form of not a speech but by the issuing of a statement on their official website. This 'e-memorandum', or 'e-coup', as it was soon coined, warned the AKP government against the nomination of an AKP party member for presidency, and reminded the public and the government that the TAF considers itself the "absolute defender of secularism" (BBC News 2007). Public protests against Gül's election followed, but these protests were paired with a common notion that although there was an opposition to Gül, a military intervention would also be opposed (Turan and Gürsoy 2014, 138). Gül was eventually elected, and his election was a turning point in Turkey's political history, as it was the first time a non-secularist was elected president of the Republic. Having a non-secularist in the presidency also increased the ease with which AKP could appoint Islamists into open positions in the Turkish bureaucracy and judiciary, since the previous president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, had been a firm secularist and had no qualms about vetoing many of AKP's appointments (Jenkins 2009, 29).

C. De-securitization policies

AKP also managed to limit the power of the military through desecuritization policies. These policies sought to desecuritize domestic and foreign policy issues that had previously been dealt with primarily by the military. The best examples of this are political Islam, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and issues with neighbors (Akur 2012, 235).

1. Political Islam

AKP attempted to soothe the secular TAF's fears about the party having some secret hidden Islamic agenda. The party did this by distancing itself from Islamic policies at the same time as aligning itself fully with a commitment to join the European Union and stressing that its number one priority was the improvement of the Turkish economy. It initially avoided Islamist social issues, although the issues of banning adultery and allowing the wearing of the headscarf in universities did come to the forefront of government attention for a time (in 2007, AKP attempted to have the ban on headscarves in public universities removed. The constitution was amended to allow for this, and universities were instructed to let women wearing headscarves onto campuses, although very few universities complied with this order (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008, 63)). However, AKP for the most part did not force Islamist policies through parliament, despite the fact that their large majority would have allowed them to at times.

2. PKK

In an effort to de-securitize issues with the PKK and the Kurdish minority in Turkey, AKP enacted a series of 'democratic openings' in July 2009. These openings attempted to deal with the PKK and Kurdish rights in a more tolerant and peaceful method than had been practiced by previous governments. These democratic openings took the form of offers of political amnesty to some members of the PKK and of offers of compromises to the minority population of Kurds within Turkey. These compromises included increased minority rights, greater cultural rights, allowance of the Kurdish language to be taught in some schools, and concessions on the long-demanded local autonomy of the Kurdish minority populations. However, just a few months after the beginning of the Kurdish opening was announced, AKP discontinued the project due to strong backlash from Turkish nationalists (Aknur 2012, 239).

3. Issues with neighbors

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's 'zero-problem-with-neighbors' policy sought to fix issues with neighbors like Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Dialogue and diplomatic contact between Turkey and these neighbors increased, with a strengthening of economic ties and open dialogue, as well as the signing of free trade agreements with Syria and pipeline agreements with Iran. By turning these relationships from security-oriented ones to diplomatic ones, AKP decreased the need for the military's involvement in foreign policy (Aknur 2012, 240-242).

D. Ergenekon and Sledgehammer

1. The investigations and trials

The Ergenekon investigation was an investigation into the Turkish Deep State, specifically, the 'Ergenekon' group. This group was alleged to be a centrally controlled clandestine-military force, which was accused by AKP of planning to cause social foment and political unrest in Turkey with the goal of creating the right atmosphere for a military intervention that would then unseat the AKP government. The military and other secularists in Turkey, on the other hand, saw the investigation into Ergenekon as a plan by AKP to discredit and disempower the military in order to finally achieve the hidden underlying goal of AKP: the establishment of Islamic rule and an Islamic state in Turkey (Jenkins 2009, 32).

The investigation into Ergenekon began in 2006 with the uncovering of huge stockpiles of weapons, including grenades and explosives, as well as diagrams outlining plans for attempts at the assassination of Erdogan and other high-ranking AKP figures (2009, 39). These were found to belong to a retired army officer, and the finding of the weapons was followed in 2008 by the arrests of dozens of people, ranging from former military officers and gendarmerie generals to professors, journalists and members of nationalist or right-wing groups. As the investiga-

tion continued, it seemed that anyone who had shown any verbal opposition to AKP or AKP policies was targeted (2009, 47).

Eventually, over 200 suspects would be detained. This number included professors, university rectors, academics, the former commander of the Gendarmerie, the retired first commanders of the Third Army and First Army, as well as low-ranking members of the military and even a student at a military high school. The suspects were charged not only with possessing illegal weapons, but also with being members of the terrorist organization called Ergenekon, of attempting to overthrow the government, for inciting an armed rebellion, and for stealing confidential state-security documents. Investigators claimed to have discovered evidence of several coup plans in diary entries, as well as in Power Point presentations (2009, 72).

These coup plans involved assassinations and bombings in order to incite chaos and up the pressure on AKP. The Ergenekon group was accused of various acts of violence that had taken place in Turkey, including the death of a judge in 2006, a coffee-shop shooting which killed 17 people in 1995, the murder of Professor Hablemitoglu in 2002, the murder of a priest in 2006, among other murders and assassinations from around 1990 to 2008. Generally, these were murders of secular community members, apparently to make it more believable that the pro-Islamist AKP could be behind the killings. Ergenekon was also accused of planning the assassination of former Commander Yasar Buyukanit, and an attack on NATO facilities (although neither of these events actually occurred) (Open Source Center Report 2010).

As Gareth H. Jenkins writes in *Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation*, "although the organization…Ergenekon…does not exist, for AKP supporters and…the Islamist camp it is too convenient a fiction to be ignored…Holding secular ultranationalist with links to the military responsible for every act of political violence in recent Turkish history discredits the military itself, which…remains the most formidable obstacle to any attempt to change

the prevailing interpretation of secularism in Turkey" (2009, 80). The Ergenekon investigation has been criticized for disregarding standards of due process and utilizing problematic and circumstantial evidence in trials. However, AKP voiced its support for the investigation and maintained its support during the trials of the accused.

The alleged 'Sledgehammer', or Balyoz, coup plot was unearthed in 2010. The supposed plan of Sledgehammer was, like Ergenekon, to destabilize Turkey by inciting chaos through the use of violence in order to warrant a military coup. The plan was purportedly to bomb two mosques and then shoot down an F-16 Turkish fighter jet over the Aegean and blame Greece for it. Throughout 2010 and into 2011, hundreds of people, mostly military personnel, were detained and arrested under allegations of attempting to overthrow the government. This plot was supposed to have been created just after the election of AKP in 2002. Again, the evidence used against the accused was extremely problematic and contained a great many inconsistencies. For example, in the unearthed coup plans, which were alleged to have been drawn up in late 2002 or 2003, companies, ships, hospitals, and organizations were referred to by names that they would only come to acquire years later (Rodrik 2011, 102; Righter 2011). These discrepancies seem to show that the evidence was manufactured and was actually created closer to 2009.

In July 2011, the entire military high command resigned in the face of these arrests. The Chief of the General Staff, General Kosaner, and the commanders of the army, navy, and air forces all submitted their resignations in response to the arrests made regarding the Sledgehammer case; the resignations came the day after several generals and officers were convicted of trying to overthrow the AKP government (BBC News 2011). General Kosaner said he was resigning in protest at the arrests of the hundreds of military officers and generals. He accused AKP of attempting to keep the investigations and, therefore, the military, in the news for a prolonged period with the aim of discrediting the military and creating the notion that it is a criminal organi-

zation rather than a trusted Turkish institution (Righter 2011). This mass resignation of the upper echelons of the TAF was unprecedented in Turkish history. It also allowed for Erdogan to take control over the military's promotion process. He was able to nominate into these now empty positions AKP loyalists or at least military officials who were friendlier toward AKP and Islam than the previous officials.

2. Loss of public support

The Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases were regarded as another watershed moment in Turkish political history; it was assumed to mark the end of the period of military guardianship over the country and the beginning of a standard, civilian-ruled democracy. Despite the problematic evidence and the fact that many of the accused were either not charged or later acquitted, the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations and judicial cases did succeed in damaging the Turkish military's credibility and decreasing its public support. In a survey taken in 2011, 60% of respondents said that they trusted the TAF; a stark decrease from surveys conducted in the early 2000s, when approximately 90% of respondents said they trusted the military (Tuysuz and Tavernise 2011; Gürsoy 2012, 11). The 60% number is comparable to the level of support for the military in Europe and other Western democracies. After the investigations, on average the European citizens' trust of their country's militaries ended up comparable to surveyed Turkish citizens' trust, whereas before Turkish trust had been well above the average (Gürsoy 2012, 5).

The loss of public support meant that should the military attempt to intervene in politics again, it would not be perceived as having legitimacy. It is clear when one looks at the prior military interventions in Turkish politics that these events (the coups) did not lead to mass public opposition; generally the public believed and supported the TAF's role as a guardian of the democracy and expected the TAF to step in when it seemed that the Turkish democracy was in a state of chaos due to inefficient elected governments. For example, in 1996, during the Islamist Wel-

fare Party's rule and a few months before the 1997 coup would take place, 81% of respondents in a poll of Turkish citizens said they trusted the military, while only 17% said they trusted politicians (Jenkins 2001, 18). When the 1997 military coup occurred, it was amid political and social chaos, and the coup was, for the most part, welcomed by the public.

E. 2016 attempted coup

The results of this loss in public support revealed themselves clearly in 2016, during an attempted coup by a section of the Turkish military who called themselves the Peace at Home Council. The 15th of July attempted coup occurred in several Turkish cities simultaneously with the goal of ousting AKP from the government. Parliament and other government buildings were bombed by Turkish fighter jets, and soldiers and tanks filled streets. Unlike in prior military coups, however, this time citizens took to the streets and fought back against the soldiers, with the help of police forces and soldiers loyal to Erdogan's government. It became the bloodiest attempted coup in Turkish history, with 241 deaths— mostly civilian— and thousands of injuries.

There are various reasons for the failure of the 15th of July coup, such as it not having the support of the upper echelons of the military (several of the military's top commanders denounced the coup immediately and ordered soldiers to return to their barracks), for failing to control the media, and for failing to apprehend Erdogan, who was safe and able to broadcast to the population through a FaceTime call and urge the public into action against the coup. Clearly this coup did not have the same sort of public backing that had been experienced in the four previous successful coups since 1960; it was unprecedented that thousands of citizens should flood the streets to show their opposition to a military takeover.

AKP used the 15th of July coup as an excuse to crack down on any dissent within the country. The coup was blamed on the Gülenist, or Hizmet, movement, which is identified as a

terrorist organization by the Turkish government. The Gülen movement is a community of people who follow the leadership of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric who has been living in the United States since 1999. Gülen preached for a cultural Islam that focuses on education, volunteerism and hard work, and the movement began opening schools in the 1980s— today thousands of these Hizmet schools exist in over 180 countries. Eventually, followers of the movement who had been educated in the Turkish Hizmet schools began to get jobs in Turkish public and private institutions (BBC 2016). The Hizmet movement had originally worked with AKP, reportedly helping to secure AKP's position in government and using its power in the judiciary to stop the closure of the party in 2008. However, a few years later the relationship between AKP and the Gülen movement had begun to sour, with Erdogan claiming that the movement had ulterior motives (Yetkin 2017).

By 2016 these Gülenists had allegedly infiltrated the military, the government, the media, and the judiciary. Several days after the coup, the government declared the country in a state of emergency in order to weed out coup-supporters in the military, bureaucracy, education system, media, state institutions and every branch of government. What followed was the arrest of tens of thousands of people (some estimates put this number as high as 50,000), as well as thousands of dismissals—of teachers, journalists, police officers, civil servants, and, of course, military members—over 17,000 military members in total (Turkey Purge 2019). These officers were replaced by junior officers, promoted by AKP (Beesley 2016). Hundreds of schools were shut down, as well as dozens of radio stations, television channels, newspapers, and entire publishing houses, and over 70,000 passports seized.

AKP used the failed coup as an excuse to make several changes to the structure of the army—the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard were placed under the control of the Interior Ministry, and military high schools and academies were closed and reopened under the control of the Min-

istry of Defense. The Land, Naval and Air Forces were also brought under the Ministry of Defense (Tol, Mainzer and Ekmekci 2016), rather than the Prime Minister's office. AKP's reaction to the coup was so extreme that even the EU spoke up, accusing AKP of taking advantage of the coup to centralize its power and conduct a purge that would rid the country of any opposition or dissidents to the party within Turkey (Al Jazeera 2017).

Despite the EU speaking out, lack of public trust in the Turkish Armed Forces, which had been decreasing since the beginning of the 2000s and had been exacerbated by the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations, now took an even larger plunge. In the beginning of 2016, the military was still the most trusted institution in the country, with 62%; after the coup, the military fell into second place at 47%, while trust in the presidency rose to 49% (Hurriyet Daily News 2017).

VII. How Real/Final Are These Changes?

The question that must be asked now is how final are these changes to the power of the TAF to play a role in Turkish politics? I believe that there is one variable that could bring the Turkish military back into a position of political power. We have seen the popularity of AKP increase at the expense of the popularity of the military. A loss in popularity for AKP might be met with an increase in the popularity of the TAF, as the population once again turns to the Turkish military to safeguard their democracy from a leader who is ever more authoritarian and undemocratic. AKP was elected between 2002 and 2019 by winning large majorities of the vote. Citizens who voted for this party obviously would not the party ousted from government.

The most recent mayoral elections in Ankara—Turkey's capital—and Istanbul—Turkey's largest city—that took place during the spring of 2019, seem to illustrate a decline in AKP's popularity, especially in urban areas. In late March, AKP lost control of Turkey's capital

city for with the election of Mansur Yavas, a Republican People's Party candidate, to mayorship (McKernan 2019).

During the run-up to the Istanbul mayoral elections, Erdogan had threatened that if the opposition candidate was elected he would be removed from office for reasons involving insults allegedly made by the opposition candidate to a governor. Erdogan's candidate lost the election, and Erdogan ordered a recount. When Ekrem Imamoglu of the opposition Republican People's Party proved still to be the victor, Erdogan had the election annulled claiming voter irregularities despite a public and international outcry. New elections were called for June—Erdogan's candidate then lost by an even larger margin. (In the end, Erdogan did not have Imamoglu removed from office like he had threatened.) Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey, with a population of over 16 million. It was also considered Erdogan's base and bastion of political power, as he was born and raised there and had served as Istanbul's mayor from 1994 to 1998, so this loss can be considered particularly meaningful (BBC News 2019).

The Ankara and Istanbul mayoral elections marked the first time in 25 years that AKP would not control the cities. The loss in AKP's popularity can be seen to be the result of the economic recession that began in Turkey in 2019, after Erdogan had overseen over 18 years of growth in the economic market. This growth is what made his party so popular and enabled AKP to stay in power. But the recession has led to higher rates of unemployment as well as inflation, which is more pronounced in Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities than elsewhere in the country (Gall 2019;). There is a possibility that if the recession continues and its effects begin to be felt outside of large cities, AKP could see its popularity decline not just in Istanbul and Ankara but in rural areas as well.

As the percentage of votes for AKP decreases, we could very possibly see an increased willingness or even desire of the people to have the military step in and regain its place as the

guardians of the secular Turkish republic. There is also a question in the case of AKP being voted out of government, whether a regime change will occur with the cooperation of Erdogan and AKP or whether they will resist it; in that scenario, the military may be the only institution in Turkey capable of ousting them from government. Does the military still maintain this capability if it had the backing of the public? Or has the civilian-led restructuring of the military made the TAF ineffective? Have the ranks of the TAF been infiltrated by AKP loyalists and Islamists, precluding the possibility of such an act?

VIII. Conclusion

The military has had an important political position in Turkey since the country was declared a republic in 1923, but in reality, this role reaches back through history to the 14th century when the Ottoman Empire was a military machine that counted on its army not only to gain additional territory but also to protect its existing lands. The Turkish public has always held the TAF in high regard, seeing them as the protectors of the Republic and of the upholders of democracy and Kemal Atatürk's values, and until recent surveys, the TAF was consistently the most trusted institution within the country. This favorable view of the Turkish military as the guardians of the country led to public support, if not an expectation, for the TAF to intervene in politics during times of extreme social unrest when the government was seen as not being capable of upholding the nations democratic and secular values. Four of these military interventions took place between 1960 and 1997, and were all supported, or at least not initially widely protested, by the public.

Since 1923, Turkey's military has had some political power, because the government was made up mostly of former military officers and generals. In 1983, however, after the third military coup, the military drafted a new constitution that institutionalized the military's power in

politics in a more defined way through the creation of the National Security Council. This council, made up of military and civilian personnel, made decisions on issues of national security and delivered the decisions to the Council of Ministers to be given priority consideration in developing foreign and domestic policy. The Turkish military also enjoyed seats on several state institutions, including those overlooking higher education and the media, and wielded power through State Security Courts, which tried both military and civilian personnel. Additionally, the TAF oversaw their own budget; there was very little civilian oversight of anything concerning the functioning or funding of the armed forces. When these institutionalized channels of power were not sufficient, the military could influence politics through informal methods, like speeches and public statements in which the military's position on a matter was voiced in order to garner public support and pressure the government into taking a particular action or stance on an issue.

In 1999, Turkey was given candidate status into the European Union and in 2002 the Justice and Development Party was elected into government with a large majority. It was at this point that the military's political power began to wane. First, reforms were passed in order to bring Turkey closer to European standards of democracy, which require that the military comes under civilian control. The Turkish military for the most part did not resist these changes, as they supported Turkish accession to the European Union as a way to further westernize Turkey, which had been one of the main goals of Kemal Atatürk.

The powers of the NSC were limited, the State Security Courts were abolished, and the military lost its seats on the High Audio-Visual Board and the Council of Higher Education. Civilian oversight of the TAFs' budget was increased and the Constitution was amended to specify that the TAF's role was protector of the Republic against external, rather than both internal and external, threats. The EU also criticized the speeches given by high-ranking military personnel, so informally speaking, the military began to lose some of its access to press conferences, and its

ability to make public statements was limited. Turkey's elected government also began to follow a policy of de-securitization, in which it attempted to deal with its foreign and domestic issues (Syria, Greece, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, and the PKK) diplomatically rather than with threat of military force; in this way, many of Turkey's main security threats were de-securitized and the military was no longer as necessary in creating policy to deal with these problems.

Further limitations to the military's power came at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, with the Ergenekon and Sledgehammer investigations. These investigations claimed that segments of the TAF had plotted coups against the AKP government starting in 2003. Allegedly, the plan was to incite chaos in Turkey and destabilize the country in order to warrant a military coup. The investigations led to the arrests of hundreds of military officers of both higher and lower rankings, and seriously damaged the publics' trust in the military. Surveys taken after the trials showed that public trust in the military had fallen and was closer to the average of European Union member countries, whereas before it had been much higher.

Finally, in 2016, things came to a head when a section of the Turkish military attempted an armed coup. The 15th of July coup attempt was the most violent in Turkish history, and, notably, failed. The coup makers made several key mistakes, and Erdogan was able to speak to the public and call on them to 'defend democracy'; thousands of civilians took to the street and fought back against the soldiers and tanks. This was unprecedented in Turkish history. AKP used this coup as an excuse to crack down on any dissenters in the Turkish military, police and government, but also school system, and courts. AKP made several structural changes to the TAF in order to bring it under civilian control, and thousands of military officers were fired and replaced by junior officers appointed to their new positions by AKP. The purging of the officer corps has continued until today, and the rounding up of military officers—up to 30,000 since the attempted coup—on grounds of involvement in the 15th of June coup has become almost routine. To take

the place of the thousands of purged officers, over 50,000 new recruits appointed by AKP have entered the TAF (Ahval News 2019). Restructuring of the army continues to this day, with the most recent occurring in the summer of 2019 that included forced downsizing, as well as a reduction of mandatory service time from 12 to six months (Baydal 2019).

Today the senior officers of the TAF are loyal to AKP, since AKP is in charge of the promotion process and can fill the top echelons of the military with officers loyal to the party. However, the atmosphere that has been created is one of mistrust, which has degraded the TAF. Officers are, reportedly, fearful of discussing politics or voicing dissent against the sitting government due to anxieties about their dismissal (Ahval News 2019). It is uncertain how the lower-ranking military class, which of course make up a majority of the armed forces, feel. It is likely that they are more secularist than the high-ranking, AKP-appointees, as they traditionally have been, but this is speculative.

Whether the military will ever be capable of another coup is also uncertain. Due to the Turkish recession that began in 2018, Erdogan appears to be losing his grip on power—this was illustrated pronouncedly in the spring and summer of 2019 Ankara and Istanbul mayoral elections, when the AKP candidates lost for the first time in nearly two decades. AKP was elected in 2002 amidst a major financial crisis, and the party oversaw the successful implementation of an International Monetary Fund loan program. Money began to enter the country through foreign direct investments and building projects, and quality of life improved within the country. Erdogan's popularity within Turkey stemmed from his overseeing nearly two decades of improvement to the Turkish economy, particularly in Istanbul where a development boom occurred and large infrastructure projects were undertaken. Structural changes were made to the Turkish economy and banks, so although Turkey suffered a recession and a rise in inflation and unemploy-

ment when the 2008 global financial crisis occurred, the Turkish economy was relatively insulated from its effects and was able to recover quickly (Pitel 2019).

In 2018 Turkey entered another recession. Food prices increased by over 30% in a single year (Sungur 2019), and in 2019 the country's unemployment rate reached nearly 15% (Erkoyun and Kucukgocmen 2019). It is possible that if the recession continues and unemployment and inflation rates do not begin to decrease soon, Erdogan and his party could see a huge loss in popularity. If AKP and Erdogan begin losing their grip on power and another political party wins control of parliament, will they give it up willingly? Turkey's current regime "no longer satisfies even the minimal requirements of democracy" (Esen and Gumuscu 2016, 1582). It has the appearance of being democratic due to regularly held elections, but these elections are not fair, the media is oppressed, human rights are often violated, and rule of law is not upheld.

Over the past 18 years, Erdogan has brought the military, the media, the police, and the judiciary under his control (2016, 1584). Will the increasingly authoritarian character of Erdogan mean that he and his party will refuse to oversee a peaceful transition of power if an opposition party wins a majority in parliament? If this becomes the case, will the Turkish military be not just willing, but capable of intervening and removing AKP from government through a military coup? The TAF have lost a great deal of their political power, but if the public expects it to defend the Turkish democracy, there is a good chance it will once again step into its traditional guardianship role.

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