

## The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: To Guard Whom and From What?

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“The Turkish Armed Forces are the most effective guarantor of the Republic in Turkey, which is a secular, social, and lawful state.” Ex-Chief of Staff, İsmail Hakkı Karadayı

***Abstract:***

*This paper tries to reveal the chief determinants of the Turkish Armed Forces' (TAF) role in political sphere. In order to shed a light upon the “guardian” role of the TAF for the secular nation-state in general and the Kemalist ideology in particular; the historical, theoretical as well as legal and institutional traits of the military interventions in Turkey will be analyzed. As already known, Turkish military played a key role in the nation-building process, hence the modernization era was also stimulated by the Army. It can be argued that, having a role like this, the military elites from the very beginning of the Republican era up to present, have not been experiencing any appreciable difficulties in placing themselves in the political life. Unlike its counterparts, the Turkish Army has a considerable amount of political and institutional autonomy which ultimately leads to emphasize its role in guarding the state from “internal enemies”. This term of “internal enemy” refers to political Islam and Kurdish movement, and from time to time the TAF exercise direct and / or indirect political authority to a variety of extents. The question of why the military elites still regard themselves as the only guarantor of the Turkish state is a crucial one to be answered. The role of the civilians, the political culture, historical*

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*background, socio-cultural structure, level of economic development and legal regulations of Turkey, all to some extent affect that role of the Army. Here I argue that multidimensional factors are determinant in shaping the military's role in politics. In addition to that, by regarding the Islamic and Kurdish identities as security issues, the military gives itself the role of guardianship of the Turkish state too. The major argument of the paper is that, the Turkish Army protects the Turkish State from the Turkish nation in the context of "internal enemy" thanks to its so-called guardianship role of the Turkish State.*

**Keywords:** Turkey; Military Intervention; Turkish Army; Kemalism; Internal Enemy; Guardianship

### Introduction

The role of the Army in Ottoman-Turkish history is an important tool to understand the main premises of Turkish political culture. With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Army started to place itself in daily politics with administrative motives. There is a consensus on the political and institutional autonomy of the Army, and that autonomy paves the way for democracy to become rather fragile. However, not so much reaction has been existent in terms of that autonomy. As a result, the democratic consolidation of Turkey cannot be fully realized. On the one hand, the military elites' role in the modernization process in the late Ottoman and early Republican era is generally taken as the principal cause of military interventions. Because the Turkish Army, as the sole actor in safeguarding the state from external and "internal" enemies, most of the time depends on its historical role in building a nation-state. On the other, the Army is also seen as the only legitimate guarantor of Kemalist ideology.

Indeed, the state-building process of modern Turkey is heavily based on the leadership of a group of "enlightened" elites who take themselves as the principal actors in creating a modern Westernized state. In that process, the public was alienated from the new state while the civilians were given secondary roles. The Republic of Turkey from the very beginning, has not been an instrument for protecting the liberties of the individuals as classical liberalism argues, by contrast, the state has been a metaphysical entity which has a great autonomy and an intrinsic value (Demirel, 2002: 31).

It would be not wrong to say that, the military institutions which encompass discipline, hierarchy, and a rigid obeisance cannot easily become accustomed to

live in harmony with democratic procedures. Because, the military elites see the politicians as interest-seekers with a high level of ignorance. Being parallel to that, the statistical data about the trust in institutions reveals the fact that, in terms of the trust in institutions, the Army gets the first sequence. In addition to that, the legacy of Atatürk paves the way for the Army to make itself more powerful in combating “internal” enemies.

By focusing on the historical context of civil-military relations in Turkey, the paper reveals the core assumptions of the causes of the military elites’ role in politics. It is important to note that, in order to understand the democratization of Turkey, the dynamic and complex relationship between the civil and the military elites must be analyzed deeply. The role of the military in Turkish politics is chiefly derived from its guardianship of the Turkish Republic and Kemalist principles<sup>2</sup>. It can be asserted that this kind of guardianship dates back to the Army’s activities in shaping the parameters of the social and political realms in the state-building process.

The societal dynamics of Turkish modernization also gives priority to the TAF in terms of shaping political and social structures. As already known, the antagonism between the “progressive” secularists and the “unprogressive” Islamists from the late Ottoman period up to today plays a significant role in making the Army stand as the sole guarantor of modern Turkey. Because the modernization project of Turkey is largely based upon the westernization aspect and that basis supports the “progressive” secularist world view.

Ironically, the project of westernization encompasses a democratic political life which is incompatible with the Army’s view of protecting the state from “internal” enemies. Also it can be said that, the military elites’ engagement in politics cannot simply be explained in terms of protecting the regime. Moreover, the Turkish Army has been the only institution which has survived through the fall of Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Not the civilian bureaucracy, education institutions, nor the press, but the TAF remained alive. Again if we are to turn back to the historical context of military interventions, an important statement can be made: Throughout the Republican period, particularly during times of political crisis Turkish society has rarely hesitated from turning to the Army as its ultimate protector. Typically, it is identified as an independent protector of the “progressive” Kemalist values.

The evolution of a guardianship mentality is grounded in particular historical circumstances. As known, soldiers occupied a privileged place in the Ottoman Empire too. Not only did the Ottoman Empire retain its initial warrior state

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<sup>2</sup> For Kemalist principles see <http://www.tk.tr/anitkabir/ilkel.html> (Reached on November, 22, 2010).

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characteristics but also the military had been both an object of, and especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, the leading proponent of the reform movement (Demirel, 2004: 128).

In this paper, the major argument is that while carrying out its so-called duty of protecting the Turkish state in general and Kemalist legacy in particular, in fact the military protects the state from the nation. Seeing itself as the sole guarantor of the Republic, it gets involved in the political sphere and this largely impedes the democratic consolidation of Turkey. Also, the military's perception of itself as the ultimate guardian of the Turkish Republic renders it difficult for soldiers fully to accept the principle of civilian supremacy. In that paper, I also claim that this role of the TAF is unchallenged to a large extent.

This paper also addresses the question of to what extent the military exercises independent political power, particularly through institutional and legal channels. Moreover, this study will concern itself with historical roots of civil-military relations. After the abolition of the Janissary in 1826, the military became one of the most Westernized elements in the Empire seeing itself as the stimulus of modernization.

Historically, not the Turkish military's attitude and discourse, but its strategic position/front within the political system has determined the parameters of its political involvement. (Sakallıoğlu, 1997:156). So the major goal of this paper is to illustrate this position with a special reference to the guardianship of the state.

The contributions to analyzing the role of military in Turkish political life by concentrating on historical, legal, institutional and socio-cultural contexts are to be found in each sub-title of the paper. First of all, I suggest that the historical perspective must be explored in order to understand the place of the military in political sphere. Secondly, the study illustrates that the Turkish Army which is the principal agent of modernization process, engage in undemocratic methods to carry out its duty of protecting the state. Ironically democracy is one of the most important elements in Westernization besides secularism and republicanism, and the military can sometimes easily cast it aside.

Thirdly, this study provides a detailed exposition of the military interventions in Turkey. Especially, the latest interventions namely, the February 28 Process and the e-memorandum of 2007 are untouched issues for many scholars. Finally, the changes in civil-military relations within the framework of the European Union (EU) candidacy which also shape the political system in Turkey will also be explained. Besides that, the concept of "internal enemy" is also very important in

understanding the role of Turkish Army in political realm. The study of that concept will play a key role in understanding whom the military elites guard and from what.

### **Historical Background of Civil-Military Relations: An Overview from the Ottoman Era up to Present**

The Army and Politics in the Ottoman History: It's known that with the start of the dissolution of the Empire, the Army began to lose its ability in protecting the territories and helping the Sultan exercise his sole authority over these territories. In parallel to the weakening political rule, the military was politicized and gave up subordinating itself to the Sultan's authority unlike in the classical period of the Ottoman Empire. Hence to shed a light upon the changing characteristics of the Janissaries would be important in understanding the changing patterns of the Army in the Empire.

In the years of intense opposition to the political rule, the insurrections within the Janissaries sometimes caused to the fall of the Sultans and even to their death. Apart from that, the military institutions were the first institutions that experienced the reform movements, and with the absence of a bourgeoisie class like that of the West, the Army played a key role in the constitutional revolutions of 1876 and 1908. During the nineteenth century, the military had been both the subject and the object of modernization. Initially the aim was to create a military that was trained, disciplined, and obedient to central authority. However, having received Western-type educations, the military started to question the power of the political elites. As known, in the classical period of the Empire, the Army had an absolute loyalty to the Sultan. From the very beginning of the Empire until its collapse, the army was the only institution which managed to survive (Hale, 1996: 14). However in the last phases of the Empire, the military was wrapped in a political character.

With the beginning of the Tanzimat Era, the politicization of the military with the support of the ulema, became an obstructive element in carrying out the reform movements. So in 1826 Mahmut II abolished the Janissaries. However his founding of the modern military schools later again paved the way for the military to get involved in political life. In the Tanzimat era, Kuleli Incident is an important case in highlighting civil-military relations of the time-being. The soldiers attempted to dethrone Abdülmecit in 1859 (Hale, 1996: 33).

The constitutional revolution of 1876 largely consisted of military motives. Some soldiers who believed that there was an urgent need to put limitations to the authorities of the Sultan played a crucial role in that revolution. However that constitutional movement was disrupted by the dissolution of the parliament by

Abdülhamit II. Some sort of absolutist rule was coming into existence in these years. On the contrary, despite the political reduction thanks to the new schools that were founded by Abdülhamit II, a new class of technocrats was emerging. In the years of the reign of Abdülhamit II, the discontent among the military officers became evident. The protection of the officers who had risen from the ranks was discomfoting the officers who had graduated from military academies.

In 1908, the 'Young Turks', a group of modern-educated officers and bureaucrats organized a constitutional revolution to modernize and strengthen state and society on the basis of a positivist and increasingly nationalist set of ideas (Zürcher, 1992: 3). Following the revolution, a counter-revolution originated by the conservative religious circles broke out in 1909. An armed insurrection broke out in the capital in the name of the restoration of Islam. Mahmut Şevket Pasha repressed it underlining that he was not on the side of any party or group with a special emphasis of the Army's neutrality. His primary goal was to keep the military out of the political sphere. It can be said that in the counter-revolution of 1909, the military officers having a low rank rebelled against the upper command.

Another substantial event related to civil-military relations of the second constitutional period is the movement of Halaskar Zabitan (Saviour Officers). This of group of officers wanted the elections of 1912 to be renewed besides demanding an unpoliticized Army. The decade from 1908 to 1918 had established the Army, in close alliance with the CUP, as the dominant element on the political scene. (Rustow, 1959: 517). Afterwards, the military officers played crucial roles, both as leaders and organizers, in the war of independence (1919 – 1922) and in the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

The Army's Role as a Founder and a Guardian: It can be asserted that the Republican leaders were realistic enough to recognize that a strong and loyal Army was vital if the young republic was to endure (Demirel, 2004: 129). Kemalist leaders saw armed forces as the main pillar of the new regime. But they were also quite aware of the fact that, the military's entanglement in politics worked against both unity and discipline in the military (Ahmad, 1969: 47, 55). After Mustafa Kemal came to power in 1923, one of his primary goals was to isolate the military command from direct involvement in partisan politics (Lerner and Robinson, 1960: 26).

Although isolated from partisan politics the Army remained an important force in at least two respects. First, economic development plans, especially during the 1930s, were shaped in part by military factors, sometimes at the expense of maximum economic return. Second, the military constituted a source of skills and facilities. In times of emergency, military commanders occasionally

took over civilian administrative functions – notably in the uprising of Sheik Said in 1925 (Ibid, 27). Apart from that, although the military was isolated from partisan politics, in fact it was used as a tool for the one-party rule. The Republican People's Party (RPP) in fact instrumentalized the Army in terms of combating reactionary forces. The "internal" forces which opposed to modernization had found the military in front of themselves as the sole protector of the new regime. The construction of the Independence Tribunals (İstiklal Mahkemeleri) is a good example of that.

With the change in political rule in 1950, a new era for civil-military relations had started. The Democrat Party (DP) was very different from the RPP in terms of its grassroots support. The political tendencies of the DP<sup>3</sup> were largely liberal, but in practical terms, it had a wide range of supporters who were unhappy with the long single-party rule.

By the mid-1950s, the autocratic policies of the DP rule caused a considerable amount of discontent among military elites and the RPP leaders. Hence the DP was losing its legitimacy in the eyes of the bureaucratic actors of the regime. It started to employ more authoritarian policies like that of establishing investigative committees. Moreover the party leaders administered censorship to the press, and day by day with the emergence of economic problems, not only the civil and military bureaucrats but also the university students and academic personnel began to feel unhappy with the DP rule. In April 1960, a series of large scale student demonstrations paralyzed university campuses and led to bloody confrontations with police forces. The imposition of martial law failed to restore order (Lombardi, 1997: 204).

In addition to internal factors, the accession of Turkey to NATO is another important factor which can be seen as one of the principal causes of the 1960 Coup. The accession of Turkey to Western alliance in 1952 opened a road to further discontent in military officers. Because in the DP rule the military elites experienced a decline in their traditional central roles that they used to enjoy under the RPP rule. Before 27 May 1960, attempts of the military officers to intervene into the political arena were witnessed. The incident of "Nine Military Officers" (Dokuz Subay Olayı) is a good instance for this.

On 27 May 1960, one of the main justifications of the military to carry out the coup was the argument that Menderes government had lost his democratic

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<sup>3</sup> The supporters of the DP did not have a uniform pattern. The villagers, the tradesmen who demanded the end of state's dominant role in industry, the workers and the civil servants who were negatively affected by the inflationist policies of the war period, and the conservatives who longed for a softer version of secularism all gave support to the DP (William Hale, 1996, 85).

legitimacy. The coup was carried out in an unhierarchical order. The high-ranking officers like Gürsel aimed to hand over the political rule to the civilians as soon as possible, whereas middle and low-ranking officers like Türkeş demanded a long period of time for the implementation of radical reforms. After the coup several members of the Menderes government were charged with various crimes. The cabinet was appointed under the name of National Unity Committee (MBK)<sup>4</sup> with the leadership of Gürsel. MBK was acting both as legislative and executive branches.

In the aftermath of the intervention the Constitution of 1924<sup>5</sup> was replaced with a new constitution in 1961. The new constitution was introducing a wide range of civil liberties besides social rights. However with the fear of a probable domination of the majority some institutions were built among which were the Constitutional Court and the National Security Council (NSC).<sup>6</sup>

Another important characteristic of that time was the antagonism in terms of the time length of the military rule. The group which was headed by Türkeş wanted a long-term of military rule; by contrast the high-ranking officers supported the view of the return of the civilian rule as soon as possible. That antagonism ended with the victory of the moderates headed by Gürsel. In a 27 May broadcast, Gürsel rejected dictatorship and announced that the government had been overthrown to help establish an honest and just democratic order to give over the administration of the state into the hands of the nation (Lombardi, 1997: 205).

The military also intervened in the universities. The Army made 147 academic personnel get deprived of their jobs. The constitution of 1961 also reveals the fact that the military elites wanted more than just a simple change in government. Also, they did not neglect to found an institution called Armed Forces Union (Silahlı Kuvvetler Birliği) to prevent any future independent action by junior officers.

The TAF dominated the political scene until 1965. It can be argued that with the foundation of OYAK, the Army began to safeguard the capitalist system which was defended by Demirel and his party. However, the political and economic stability

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<sup>4</sup> MBK was consisting of 38 members. Just six of them were high-ranking officers (Walter Weiker, 1963, 119).

<sup>5</sup> The constitution of 1924 had introduced the civil liberties in a narrow sense which caused the weakening of the accusation of constitutional violations. It was very hard to prove that the DP leaders behaved against the constitution (William Hale, 1996, 116).

<sup>6</sup> The Council can be seen as a second cabinet in addition to the Council of Ministers. The NSC gradually extended its influence over government policy and became a powerful watchdog. (Erik J. Zürcher, 2003, 245).

which the TAF desired could not last long and an indirect military intervention took place.

On 12 March 1971, the Demirel government was forced to resign after the commanders of the TAF delivered an ultimatum to the president (Ibid). Demanding a new government, the TAF asserted the urgent need for a “strong and capable government” that could redress the anarchical situation in the country. A refusal to this demand, they warned, would result in taking over the administration of the country. The regime of the time-being in fact was based on an ambiguous power configuration between the civilians and the military. In terms of legal regulations, martial law was declared and the military’s power was emphasized. Moreover, the civil rights which were widened with the 1961 Constitution were minimized.

The constitutional amendments paved the way for the space of the military judiciary to become larger compared to that of the civilian one. In addition to that, the audit of the military spendings became more secluded. These regulations did not just put the TAF in a place where it cannot be audited, but they also empowered the centralization and the autonomy of the TAF. Another important aspect of that period was the deepening of the state authority against individual rights and liberties (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 82). With the 1973 amendments the primary function of the NSC was extended to making recommendations to the government.

Turkish politics in the 1970s was characterized by fragmentation and polarization and by a lack of decisive authority on the part of the government. Polarization was evident in social sectors as well as seen in the political scene. The crisis which spawned the 1980 military intervention in Turkey was multi-faceted, including economic breakdown, civil violence, and open challenges to secularism. At the end, all these factors prepared a basis for the complete erosion of the governmental authority (Heper and Tachau, 1983: 25). The coup was carried out in a hierarchical order of the officers. The public welcomed the coup hoping to have stability in all spheres of life. First of all, the TAF dissolved the parliament, besides suspending all political parties and trade unions.

In terms of the military elites’ actions in the years between 1980 – 1983, it is obvious that the TAF has carried out radical changes in every aspect of life. However the economic program of Demirel was kept untouched. The 1980 Coup made the state apparatus become militarized in all dimensions besides making the TAF a law-maker authority (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 82). The universities were put under tight centralized control through the establishment of Higher Education Authority (YÖK).

The 1982 Constitution<sup>7</sup> which reflects the crucial patterns of that period limited the basic rights and liberties, limited the scope of the civilian judiciary branch, besides strengthening the political autonomy of the military. Moreover, it increased the authority of the President.

In 1983, under the shadow of the generals elections were held but only three parties were allowed to take part in the elections. Özal, the leader of the Motherland Party was the triumphant of the elections. Under Özal rule, a considerable degree of democratization was experienced. The issues which are regarded as 'internal security' issues like that of Kurdish nationalism were disputed in a variety of civil circles, and that was something rather unfamiliar to the Turkish public.

Evidently under Özal rule, substantial steps in the path to civilianization were taken. By appointing the member whom he supported instead of the generals' wish, he underlined the civilian supremacy. (Birand and Yalçın, 2001: 307 – 16). In terms foreign policy, it would be not wrong to say that Özal behaved independent from the military. In the Gulf Crisis Özal administered almost the whole situation on his own. However, in spite of important civilianization steps, in 1985 the military spendings were detached from political and legal audit.

By the mid-1990s, the emerging consensus between the military elites and the civilians began to break up as the democratic regime seemed unable to cope with separatist terrorism and the rise of political Islam. This break-up, in the end led to a "soft" coup d'état in 1997.

The path going to the February 28 Process must be evaluated with a multi-dimensional analysis. The strengthening of the Islamic actors in both political and economic spheres which started as a result of Özal's policies led to the variation of identities in Islamic terms. Besides economic identities, the 1990s witnessed the emergence of ethnic and religious identities. These new identities caused the dissolution of the traditional voter attitudes besides making center right parties lose electoral support. In the 1995 general elections, The Welfare Party (WP) became the triumphant party which created a considerable amount of tension in many civilian and military circles (Yavuz, 2004: 600). These people claimed that the WP did not believe in democracy and secularism as the sole characteristics of the regime.

The February 28 Process was taken into account as a process of change which was firstly recognized not by the politicians but by the military elites. This military

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<sup>7</sup> According to Article 118 of the 1982 Constitution, the NSC "shall submit to the Council of Ministers its recommendations against the internal and external security of the country." (Metin Heper and Aylin Güney 2000, 637).

intervention was seen as an indication of the replacement of communism threat with that of 'İrtica' (Kongar, 2000: 19). The military intervention in 1997 did not overthrow the democratic mechanisms, whereas making it function under military tutelage (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 13).

One of the developments which led to the February 28 Process was the role of the mainstream Turkish media. Mainstream media of the time-being helped the TAF make the public feel alarmed about secularism. Indeed, besides artificial agendas of the so-called threats directed to secularism and democracy, some activities of the WP played a determinant role in causing this military intervention. For instance, Erdogan's visit to Libya can be seen as an important cornerstone in the path to the February 28 Process. In addition to that, Erdogan's visit to Iran alarmed the generals (Akpınar, 2001: 85 – 88).

Although the main motives behind this "soft coup" were similar to its predecessors, this coup was carried out differently from its predecessors in a number of ways: First, it was not carried out with guns and tanks but with "civil" society organizations' campaigns, media and judges' support. Second, the military elites used briefings, conferences, and regularly-organized public declarations which were addressing to the threats of Political Islam and Kurdish nationalism against the survival of the state (Yavuz, 2004: 330). Hence the justification of this intervention was also prepared with the help of these "non-military" tools.

Unlike its predecessors, the military intervention in 1997 made Turkey witness some kind of cooperation between the TAF and the non-governmental organizations ("civil" society organizations). These organizations played a crucial role in justifying the military's intervention into politics. The protest march of the "Kemalist" academics of Istanbul University against anti-secular forces, and the visit of some of the woman associations to Anıtkabir helped the military seem to have a right in intervening into the political sphere (Jenkins, 2001: 62).

In the February 28 Process, a series of legal regulations were carried out which increased the capabilities of the TAF in political and administrative realms. One of these legal regulations was the Public Act of The Prime Ministry Crisis Management Center (Başbakanlık Kriz Yönetim Merkezi Yönetmeliği) (Sevinç, 2000: 64). This public act was established with a view to eliminate the sanctions of the Public Act of Crisis Evaluation Board of 1976. It regarded the legal and constitutional references of the crisis in a quite ambiguous way so as to see the social movements that are hard to be defined objectively as elements of disorder (Bayramoğlu, 2006: 110).

This public act was also seen as a legal tool of the military in order to have a say in political issues without employing direct-control and/or rule. It made the parliament get deprived of its authority in decision-making at the times of wide-ranging crisis (İnsel, 1997: 115). Because the military elites had more ability in exercising rule about administrative and political issues by deciding if there existed any crisis or not and by choosing the “rational” options for combating the crisis on their own.

The NSC meeting held on February 28 in 1997 ended with a declaration of the generals' wishes to the government. That declaration was evaluated as a “memorandum” which largely consisted of statist and ideological motives (Erdoğan, 1999: 24). It is argued that, under the guise of safeguarding the secular character of the regime, the TAF in fact was imposing a certain kind of world view by some kind of social-engineering (Ibid). Another argument related to that military intervention is about the state behavior towards secularism and identity issues. Afterwards making the democratically-elected government headed by Islamist leader Erbakan lose office, the military elites played a key role in reformulating the identity-related policies of the state as a zero-sum game (Cizre, 2006: 135).

The claim that the secular character of the regime had been under a serious threat in that process, made Turkey experience a plenty of unfair operations towards religious people. At this juncture, the role of the mainstream Turkish media was undisputedly dominant in making the Islamic identities of the religious people seem as a source of internal security issue. In that period, important steps were taken in order to eliminate the religion-oriented elements from the public sphere. In combating the so-called “Islamic threat” within the Army, a body named the Western Working Group was established. That body was targeting “İrtica”, because it was claimed that, political Islam was as dangerous as terrorism (Bölügiray, 1999: 150 – 1).

Indeed, the basis of justification of Western Working Group was built thanks to the briefings presented to the members of the judiciary branch and Turkish media. In these briefings, the military's right to intervene into politics as the sole guardian of the Turkish Republic was highlighted (Erdoğan, 1999: 258). After a series of briefings presented to judges and journalists, the mainstream media increased the density of its pressure against the government. In addition, the “civil” society organizations increased their campaigns against the government in order to weaken the legitimacy of the politicians. Finally, Erbakan was forced to resign, and the democratically-elected government once again lost power by the leading of the military. In 1997, once again the Turkish Army proved that it was the sole protector of the regime no matter how strong a political party's electoral basis had been.

### Theoretical Framework of Civil – Military Relations in Turkey

The military coups which took place in Turkey can be put under the title of one of the typologies of civil-military relations. First of all, the identifying characteristics of these typologies will be explained. Later on, the military coups of Turkey will be studied in order to see for which typology each intervention fits best. The literature on the political role of the Army in modern states helps in understanding different models of military interventions.<sup>8</sup> Apart from that, the cases wherein the military elites keep far from politics and are subject to civilians highlight the control of civil-military relations which emphasizes the Army as not being an autonomous force in the political sphere.

One of the control models wherein the military is subject to the civilians is the 'traditional-aristocratic model'. In this model, the military and civilian authorities are shared by the same aristocratic class and because of the high professionalism of the military, politicization of the military officers is not a point at issue (Hale, 1996: 258). In the 'totalitarian model', the military is in harmony with the political authority. The officers are rewarded because of their harmony with the political order. In Communist China and Soviet Union, this model was existent (Quoted in Örs, 1996: 102). Another model wherein the military keeps away from politics is the 'liberal-democratic model'.<sup>9</sup> In that model, the Army is totally distinct from the political authority and quite professionalized as well as being subject to civilian rule and de-politicized (Ibid, 101).

In contrast to these models, in the countries which lack powerful political institutions and adequate mechanisms for coping with social and financial problems, different typologies are witnessed. In these countries, the Army gets involved in economic, political and social situations as well as exercising political rule for a variety of lengths of time depending on the typology it belongs to (Janowitz, 1977: 83). The length of time of the military rule and the degrees and scopes of military restructuring in the existent order determine the types of typologies.

The 'Veto Regimes' do not directly take over the political rule, but exercises some kind of veto authority upon decision-making processes. This type generally favors the status-quo wherein the civilian political institutions keep functioning underneath the shadow of the military (Ibid). Apart from that, the military can

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<sup>8</sup> Eric Nordlinger, **Soldiers in Politics : Military Coups and Governments**, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1977 ; Morris Janowitz, **Military Institutions and Coercion in The Developing Nations**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> For further information about 'liberal-democratic model' see Fazıl Hüsnü Erdem, "Liberal-Demokratik Kuram Bağlamında Sivil-Asker İlişkileri", **Yeni Türkiye –Liberalizm Özel Sayısı** , Yıl: 5 Sayı:25 Ocak-Şubat 1999, pp.145-165.

directly take over the political rule but with an intention of provisional ruling. In that type called the 'Guardian Regime', the military officers argue that they have to clean the mess of the civilian politicians. The restriction of civil liberties is largely experienced in this type (Quoted in Hale, 1996: 260). Lastly the 'Dominating Regimes' exercise much more influence than the previous types. The military chooses to exercise political rule for a long period of time. The officers see themselves as the radical modernizers and they control the media very strictly. In that type, most of the time, political parties, civil associations and trade unions etc are closed down (Ibid).

In the early Republican Era until the late 1940s, the relationship between the Turkish Army and the political rulers - namely the RPP- can be defined similar to that of 'totalitarian model' of civil-military control models. In those years, the military was in compatibility with the political authority. On the other hand, the first military coup of modern Turkey in 1960 is defined as the 'Guardian Regime' by Nordlinger<sup>10</sup>. The intervention in 1971 can be evaluated as a 'Veto Regime' (Knudsen, 2005: 11). The coup in 1980 is similar to 'Guardian Regime' but unlike on 27 May, on 12 September, the military intervened for a longer time to exercise political rule. The "post-modern coup" in 1997 can be regarded as a 'Veto Regime' similar to that of 1971 (Ibid). But unlike its predecessor, the soft coup in 1997 was supported by "civil" society organizations as well as trade unions and some important academic figures.

YEAR	TYPE OF COUP	TYPE OF MILITARY REGIME
1960	Coup d'état	Guardian Regime
1971	Coup by memorandum	Veto Regime
1980	Coup d'état	Guardian Regime
1997	"post-modern" coup (to force a government to resign through NSC)	Veto Regime

**Table 1.** Military coups in Turkey and types of military regimes.

<sup>10</sup> See Eric Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics : Military Coups and Governments*, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1977.

### **The Legal and Institutional Grounds of the Army's Politicization in Turkey**

The historical context of modern Turkey<sup>11</sup> in fact gives the TAF a privileged position in terms of guarding the Turkish Republic and having some kind of political role. As known, the only institution that circuited from the Ottoman period to modern Turkey was the Army. Besides that, the key role the TAF played in creating a nation-state has been justifying the military's so-called role as the sole guardian of the regime. Essentially, as stated above, the military interventions have been justified by the military's duty of protecting Turkey from external and "internal" enemies. However, there are legal and institutional grounds which help the military intervene into the political sphere easily.

Above all, as known, the 1961 Constitution had built new institutions for a probable risk of the majority domination. The Constitutional Court and two assemblies can be given as good indicators of that. Actually, the National Security Council is the most important institution which was built just after the 1960 coup as a mechanism to help the military exercise political authority underneath civilian rule. "[i]ntroduced by the 1961 Constitution as an embodiment of the bureaucracy's primacy over the popularly elected parliament, it was designed to serve as a platform for the military to voice its opinion on matters of national security." (Sakallıoğlu, 1997:157). Reflecting the more liberal outlook of 1960s, civilian members exceeded senior commanders on it.<sup>12</sup>

With the 1973 amendments, the primary function of the NSC was extended to making recommendations to the government. Finally, under the 1982 Constitution its status was enhanced: its recommendations would be given priority consideration by the council of ministers. The number of the senior commanders also increased at the expense of civilian members (Ibid). The NSC is evaluated as the most decisive leg of a dual system of executive decision-making, the other leg being the council of ministers (Ibid, 158). The concrete decisions of the NSC cover a wide spectrum: determining the curriculum in schools; regulating television stations' broadcasting hours; abolishing the penal immunity of members of parliament from the (Kurdish) Democracy Party; closing down certain prisons and television stations; making bureaucratic appointments of the ministry of public works in the southeast; suggesting the formation of electoral alignments between political parties before 1994 local elections; stating the substance of laws on terror

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<sup>11</sup> The high status and prestige of soldiers is grounded in cultural and historical experience. Soldiers were at the forefront in the war of independence and in the establishment of the Republic (Quoted in Tanel Demirel, 2004, 139).

<sup>12</sup> Along with the general chief of staff and the three force commanders, it consisted of the prime minister and a number of ministers. Depending on the situation, some of these ministers were specified, while others were left to the prime minister's discretion ( Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, 1997, 164).

and capital punishment; and offering Arabic as an elective subject in secondary schools (Ibid).

The NSC's decisions became some kind of directives after the military coup in 1980. The council of ministers was responsible to regard the decisions taken in the NSC as directives. The NSC<sup>13</sup> was re-constituted with the 1982 Constitution's 118<sup>th</sup> article. It was enhanced in taking political decisions and making them get executed (Çelik, 2008: 248).

On the other hand, another institutional ground that paves the way for the Turkish Army's pervasive influence throughout the political system is about the organization of Defense. It can be said that, although Turkey has a single ministry of defense, rather than separate branch ministries, it is not quite correct to assume that it established full civilian control over the military (Sakallıoğlu, 1997: 159).

The position of the Turkish general chief of staff has gone through three stages. In 1924, it was subjected to the prime minister, in 1949 it was placed under the control of the minister of defense, and under the 1961 Constitution it once again became the prime minister's responsibility. The general chief of staff is appointed by the president from the generals who commanders were formerly of generally the land forces, upon nomination by the council of ministers (Ibid).

As said earlier, other than the historical-cultural context from which the military's political power arises, legal/constitutional and institutional reasons as well as mechanisms help the military retain its privileged position in the political system too. One of the legal mechanisms is the Internal Service Code of the TAF. This code<sup>14</sup> which was enacted firstly in 1935 stated under the title of 'General Duties' that "The duty of the Turkish Armed Forces is to defend the Turkish Homeland and the Turkish Republic as defined by the Constitution, against any 'internal' and external enemies." (Polatcan, 1986: 77). Moreover, according to the 1982 Constitution, the Turkish Republic is, among other things, a secular republic. Article 85 of the Internal Service Code of the TAF stipulates that the "Turkish Armed Forces shall defend the country if necessary by force." (Heper and Güney, 2000: 637).

In contrast to the parliamentary management in many liberal democracies that prescribes in detail how the military should spend its budget, in Turkey the defense budget has never been subjected to parliamentary debate. It has not

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<sup>13</sup> For further information about the NSC after the 1980 military intervention see Seydi Çelik, *Asker ve Devlet: Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Askeri Bürokrasinin Sistem İçindeki Yeri*, İstanbul, Salyangoz, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Article 35 of this code embodies the notion of "internal enemy" and legitimizes the basis for military interventions into politics.

been discussed in the press. It has never been criticized. In brief it can be said that, unless it originates from the military, a reduction in defense expenditures and in the size of the armed forces is not likely.

As known, after the 1960 military coup, the Turkish generals took measures to promote the private sector and to place itself closer to the emerging bourgeoisie. A primary means of pursuing these objectives was the establishment of the Army Mutual Assistance Association (OYAK) in 1961 (Jacoby, 2003: 677). In this respect, it can be noted that, since the establishment of OYAK<sup>15</sup>, the Turkish Army have sought to cooperate with an industrial elite and tried to purvey an adequate political and social environment for its own economic interests. It is argued that, the actual reason of OYAK's economic success is its legal \constitutional privileges that make it exempt from a certain amount of taxation (Ünsaldı, 2008: 254).

### **The Concept of "Internal Enemy" or an Attempt to Justify the Role of the Military in Politics?**

From the very beginning of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish Army has been following the rhetoric of "internal enemy" in order to make its stand on the political ground enhanced. To give an example, in the nation-building process and in the late Ottoman period, the reactionary forces which opposed to the modernization movement and Kemalist revolutions were labeled as "internal enemies" against the solidarity of the nation-state and continuity of the Kemalist reforms. In addition to that, external enemies can be seen as functional because they keep the nation's solidarity intact against a common threat (Ergil, Today's Zaman: November 24, 2010). In retrospect, the main rhetoric of the military's "internal enemy" concept has been evident in two fields: One is in the political realm namely the political Islam or the threat of "İrtica", the other is found in ethnic issues as well as having some kind of political traits: Kurdish nationalism, namely the case of PKK.

It is argued that if the enemy is within, than the nation is divided and weak (Ibid). Hence in Turkey, it is quite usual to see a political system which is unable to combat "internal enemies" in a sense inviting the military to cope with these enemies. On the other hand, along with Turkey's accession to NATO, the concept of "internal enemy" gained a concrete basis. In this respect it is not hard to say that The Red Book or the National Security Policy Document (MGSB) inherited from the

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive study about the OYAK, see İsmet Akça. 2006. "Kolektif Bir Sermayedar Olarak TSK", In Ali Bayramoğlu, Ahmet İnel (Ed.), **Bir Zümre, Bir Parti Türkiye'de Ordu**, İstanbul :Birikim, pp. 225- 70.

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US after Turkey's NATO membership is used to reveal the threats and dangers against the country. Also the ways to overcome these threats and dangers are also listed in that document. One of the leading Turkish scholars states the following identifications about the concept of "internal security" and this document:

The government is authorized by law to draft this document. However, in the past, it was always drafted by the military and the government was forced to approve it. When prepared by the military, it follows a reasoning that seeks to develop the military's structure and tools. More importantly, this document forms the framework of how the military will meddle with the civilian political sphere. The document's "internal enemy" characterizations are generally reminiscent of the ideological conflicts of the Cold War era. Thus, these enemies are the religious people who oppose the secular republic, and Kurdish separatists. However, the document does not stop by just defining these enemies. It also moves to organize the military according to these enemies. The relatively large size of the Turkish military and its deployment to even the remotest corners of the country are justified with reference to these security priorities. In other words, the Turkish military provides security not against an attack from outside, but against its own country and people. The result is an army with the tools to intervene in domestic politics. Thanks to this security organization, the military can act as a political power in the country (Türköne , Today's Zaman: October 30, 2010).

Apart from that, the mechanism which the TAF employs through the concept of "internal enemy" in order to have a critical position in the political realm can be found in military's interpretation of the Article 35 of Internal Service Code of the Army. The generals interpret this article broadly and assume a role in the political system for the sake of "protecting the country" against enemies. Here, the TAF expands the definition of enemy to potentially include political parties that are ruling the country, ethnic groups, religious groups, the Armenian issue or even water scarcity. All of these can be a reason for the TAF to get involved in politics. In the name of a possible danger for the country, the Army even monitors civic activities around the country and tying some of them to the security of the country. Moreover the TAF's broad interpretation of the concept of "internal enemy" from time to time leads the generals to send political messages on the occasion of ceremonies or days of celebrations. These speeches put emphasis on domestic politics as well as foreign policy issues.

Other than the threat of "İrtica", the ethnic and unique cultural presence of Kurds has been regarded as another "internal enemy" by the military elites in Turkey. Combating the PKK has been an effective instrument of the Turkish Army in coping with that "internal enemy". In the aftermath of the Cold War, the

National Security Policy Document issued Kurdish nationalism as the new focus of threat. The national security perception changed in the so-called February 28 Process and the threat of "İrtica" became the primary source of threat.

Another important point that needs to be considered is that, the military holds the monopoly of defining the concept of "enemy" and determining the initiatives needed to cope with that "enemy". Certain ethnic groups, certain religious groups, certain political currents that have never been associated with violence or institutions such as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in İstanbul, and so on, were labeled as "internal sources of threat" and were kept under constant surveillance and pressure (Ergil, *Today's Zaman*: March 7, 2010). In brief, it can be said that, the concept of "internal enemy" along with the military elites' monopoly of defining it paves the way for the politicization of Turkish Army. It is used as an important instrument in legitimizing military's role in the political realm.

#### **Civil-Military Relations in 2000s: Challenges and Prospects**

Over the past decade, Turkey has witnessed a relatively good deal of democratization within its political system in general and within the context of civil-military relations in particular. From the mid-1990s up to early 2000s, on the one hand, the Turkish Army placed far greater emphasis on its role as guardian of the basic principles of the Turkish state. On the other hand, the European Union (EU) has been prescribing a package of political preconditions that must be fulfilled if Turkey is to gain full membership to the EU. As a part of the accession process, the European Commission has been assessing Turkey's progress based on the fulfillment of the political criteria set out in the Copenhagen European Council meeting of 1993 (Cizre, 2004: 109).

The Copenhagen Criteria require institutional stability, complete freedom of justice, and respect for minority rights and so on. Although civil-military relations are not explicitly referred to in the Criteria, the spirit of the document is that there should be a rethinking of the military structure. Perhaps the clearest expression of the European Commission's view on this issue comes in one of the recent reports: "The basic features of a democratic system exist in Turkey, but a number of fundamental issues, such as civilian control over the military remain to be effectively addressed." (EC 2001, 97). In addition to that, the Regular

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Report of 2000 argued that the major problem about civil-military relations in Turkey is the extensive influence of the NSC over the government and its little accountability to the parliament with regard to security and defense matters (EC2000a, 12). The NSC's being not just a body established for defense and security issues, but also for the preservation of the official ideology makes a negative image for civil-military relations in Turkey in the context of EU candidacy (Jenkins, 2001: 46).

A significant step about the democratization of civil-military relations was taken in the late 1990s, military judges were removed from the state security courts. In October 2001, the number of the civilian members in the NSC was increased. At the same time the requirement that the Council of Ministers give "priority consideration" to the recommendations of the NSC was removed and replaced by an obligation that the Council be merely "notified" of them. More extensive reforms came in 2003. The requirement that the secretary general of the NSC be a serving member of the military was abolished<sup>16</sup> (Jenkins, 2007: 346). Moreover, the NSC has not anymore unlimited access to all civil institutions. The NSC does no longer have a representative in the Supervision Board of Cinema, Video, and Music. Also there is no longer any military representative in the Higher Education Authority (YÖK) too (Knudsen, 2005: 13).

Another important development related to the NSC within the 7<sup>th</sup> Harmonization Law is about the transformation of the Council from an executive decision-making board to one of an advisory board, similar to its original role as conceptualized in 1960 and in 1971 (Michaud-Emin, 2007: 28). In addition, the regular meeting of the NSC was arranged bimonthly instead of monthly meetings.

On the other hand, another EU criticism concerned the status of the Office of the Chief of the General Staff. The chief of the general staff is appointed by the president, and is responsible to the prime minister. The EU's argument is that in liberal-democratic regimes, the chief of the general staff should be responsible to the Ministry of Defense, and this should be the case in Turkey. However the TAF opposes this proposal (Güney, and Tekelioğlu, 2005: 452).

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<sup>16</sup> The 7th reform package (7th Harmonization Law) made it possible to appoint a civilian secretary general of the NSC, which actually happened in August 2004 (Bertil Videt Knudsen, 2005, 13).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The implementation of any recommendation made by the NSC has been abrogated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No more unlimited access of the NSC to any civilian agency.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The post of Secretary General will no longer be reserved exclusively for a military person.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The transparency of the defense expenditures will be enhanced.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The regular meetings of the NSC are to be held bimonthly.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** The changes introduced by the 7<sup>th</sup> Reform Package adopted in July 2003.

Despite the above-stated developments towards a democratic model of civil-military relations in Turkey, the EU still seems discontent about civil-military relations in Turkey. The 2004 Commission Report asserts that “The Armed Forces in Turkey continue to exercise influence through a series of informal channels.” (EC 2004, 15).

Traditionally being the leading promoter of Turkey's Western vocation, the military cannot remain insensitive to Western views in the area of democratization. It can be said that, the EU membership process is expected to promote further democratization and to gradually reduce the role of the military in politics (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000: 216). The military's prominent role in Turkey's political affairs has been under scrutiny by the EU, and the integration to EU needs a strict separation between civil and military authorities. Hence, further democratization of the Turkish political system is needed. However, still the Army acts like the political elites are subjected to it. The Army uses indirect and/or informal mechanisms to exercise superiority over the civilians. One example of this is the e-memorandum that occurred in 2007.

In order to understand the main features of the e-memorandum which occurred on April 27, 2007, a brief overview about the relationship between the Justice and Development Party (JDP) and the military must be made. The JDP government's overall approach towards the TAF, in its early days in office relied on a strategy of confrontation avoidance (Cizre, 2008: 134). In addition to this, the JDP government tended to avoid measures that the military would have strongly opposed (Heper, 2005: 222). Also, the JDP government has refrained from criticizing the military openly on the issues about which the military is quite sensitive. In parallel to that, it can be asserted that the JDP

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government has paid special attention to the military's views concerning those matters on which the military had expertise (Ibid: 223).

Indeed, the JDP used a strategy of trying to reduce the military's sphere of political influence. The adoption of harmonization reforms for EU membership played a significant role in this strategy. In spite of these developments the military did not abstain from undermining the JDP government. The military refrained from committing itself to a firm support when the government sought parliamentary approval for the US to launch an attack on Iraq via Turkish territory (Cizre, 2008: 143).

Although the reform packages represent a major move towards the weakening in the military's role in politics, this has not really led to a significant disengagement of military officers from politics nor led to a rethinking of their role in areas that should be under civilian control (Ibid, 146). On the other hand, a new context created by external circumstances and the gathering momentum of the deliberate policies of a popularly-backed government helps to extend the boundaries within which the civilians can operate without fear of drawing a response from the military. A leading scholar of Turkish politics claims that the JDP government and the military together managed to develop a working relationship. He states that:

Despite expectations to the contrary, the AKP government and the military have managed to develop a working relationship. Their relationship came closer to the liberal model of civil-military relations than ever before. The military grants that the government has the last word... Another much more significant reason, which is a rather recent phenomenon, is that the military, or at least the present high command came to the conclusion that an expanded role for the military, let alone military interventions of one type or another, are not panacea for the ills of democracy. (Heper, 2005: 227).

Apart from that, despite the existence of a considerable amount of the empowerment of the civilians, the military in Turkey still seems strong enough to have a right to talk about non-military issues. Seeing itself as the ultimate guarantor and the guardian of Turkey, the military still does not abstain from getting involved in political issues or exercising power through informal channels such as declarations or warnings via its web site or via its announcements to the press.

As known the crucial stimulus behind the military's so-called guardianship of the regime is its commitment to Kemalist principles in general and most importantly its commitment to secularism in particular. The e-memorandum<sup>17</sup> which occurred in 2007 was a direct result of this, related to the presidential elections. The presidency in Turkey stands as a symbol of Atatürk's legacy and historically the president was elected from among

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<sup>17</sup> See, [http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Aciklamalari/2007/BA\\_08.html](http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2007/BA_08.html) (Reached on December 3, 2010)

retired Generals—until the presidency of Turgut Özal (December 1989 – October 1993). Even the presidential palace—Çankaya—is often regarded as the symbolic but institutionalized statement of secularism (Warhola and Bezci, 2010: 10). When the JDP's candidate Abdullah Gül whose wife wears a headscarf came to the fore for the presidency, this alarmed the military which in the end issued a mid-night memorandum via internet.

The e-memorandum<sup>18</sup> implied two concerns. It showed that the military would, regardless of the EU accession process, intervene into politics when secularism was threatened. As argued from the very beginning, employing the so-called threat towards secularism, the military in fact once again attempted to protect the state from its own nation, ridiculously perceiving the headscarf of Abdullah Gül's wife as a threat to secularism. Nevertheless, for the first time in Turkish politics an elected government, the AK Party, stood against the military's threat of intervention in civil politics. The tone and substance of the TAF's statement was extremely harsh. It was extraordinary in the sense of being the first explicitly worded warning to a democratically elected government in Turkey after the country had been officially connected to the EU as a potential member. Then-spokesman of the government Cemil Çiçek replied to the e-memorandum with an even stronger declaration:

It is unthinkable that in a state governed by rule of law, the TGS [military] as an institution under the Prime Minister would speak against the government. The TGS is an institution under civilian governmental command, and its duties and responsibilities are defined by the constitution. According to our constitution, the Chief of Staff is responsible to Prime Minister because of the Chief of Staff's stated duties and authorities. (Quoted in Warhola and Bezci, 2010: 11).

The process that caused the suspension of presidential elections was stimulated not by military briefings as experienced in the February 28 Process, but by a couple of "civil" society organizations, and some of the Turkish media. In short, even the EU candidacy process cannot keep the TAF away from intervening into the political realm. Compared to the previous decades, it is obvious that the TAF's visibility in everyday politics has weakened; but it still enjoys having a relatively high degree of political role.

## Conclusion

Following the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, from the very beginning of the Turkish Republic the military has been having a relatively important place in the political scene. This is partly because of the Army's socio-historical role as a nation-building force.

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<sup>18</sup> "In the memorandum the high command issued on 27 April 2007, the expression that the TAF is a 'side' in the debate over secularism is a reiteration of the TAF's wish to be openly involved in choosing a candidate for president as an apolitical duty." (Ümit Cizre, 2008, 152).

Besides historical aspects, the Kemalist modernization project also saw the military as the main agent that is able to undertake the protection of the Republican values, largely the secularist character of the regime. By the late 1990s, however, the Turkish Army has started to adopt a secondary position in politics, mostly because of its commitment to Westernization as Atatürk emphasized in the early years of the Republic. On the contrary, following the multi-party politics, two direct military coups in 1960 and in 1980 occurred. In addition, in 1971 and 1997, indirect interventions were witnessed. The recent case of memorandum shows that the TAF still sees itself as the ultimate guarantor of the regime.

This study argues that, the military elites, by regarding the Political Islamism and Kurdish nationalism as a sort of "internal enemy" in fact protects the state from its own nation under the mask of the its so-called guardianship role. The military elites need to change their behavior and threat perceptions for the sake of democratic consolidation of Turkey.

Indeed, the TAF's role of safeguarding the regime in general and Kemalist principles in particular does not fit to the Western-oriented modernization project of Atatürk. Because in Western-type of democracies, the military is subordinated to the elected civilians and the military cannot have a say about political issues. So the TAF should consider its duty at length. The military elites should decide whom to protect, whether they will protect the Turkish state from the external enemies for the sake of a more democratic and well-off system or whether they will carry on protecting the state from its own nation no matter how undemocratic it is in the path towards the EU membership.

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