

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Revisiting Institutional/Occupational Model in Turkish Military

Adem Başpınar<sup>1</sup> 

### Abstract

This article questions the applicability of Moskos' institutional/occupational model in a non-Western country whose modernization process resembles that of Western countries. This may be important for two reasons: First, most military sociologists have based their theories on the military's position and development in Western societies. Whether the historical military development in Turkey resembles Western militaries due to the 19th-century military modernization efforts through Western experts' guidance with the military as leader in the nation's modernization or whether this historical military development had a unique structure and mission involving founding the country is debatable. Second, most existing studies on the Turkish military and civil-military relations in Turkey have been conducted by journalists, political scientists, and historians and lack a background in sociological theory. Instead, these studies have discussed the direct or indirect interventions of armed forces in politics. This paper begins building the theoretical foundation for a discussion of the opportunities and challenges of reorganizing Turkey's civil-military relations by examining the applicability of one Western model to this non-Western country.

**Keywords:** Military sociology • Institutional/occupational Model • Charles Moskos • Civil-military relations • Turkish Military

1 Adem Başpınar (Assist. Prof.) Department of Sociology, Kırklareli University Kırklareli, Türkiye. Email: [abaspinar@klu.edu.tr](mailto:abaspinar@klu.edu.tr)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-2125-1832

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The hypothesis Moskos asserted for the US military at the end of 1970s was that the US military had evolved from an institutional structure toward one resembling an occupation (the I/O thesis) (Moskos, 1977). Although many criticized this approach (Caforio, 1988; Nuciari, 1994; Segal, 1986; Sørensen, 1994), the I/O thesis created huge excitement, and studies based on this thesis became widespread both in the various structures of the US military (army, navy, air force) as well as those in European countries (Pratt, 1986; Smokovitis, 1984; Soeters, 1997). The studies have indicated a tendency going from institutional toward occupation, as Moskos had indicated (Segal & Segal, 1983, p. 162):

Although it has been subject to some criticism (Janowitz 1977), Moskos's model has influenced the research agenda of military sociology. It has been tested empirically in the United States in both the Army (Segal et al., 1983) and the Air Force (Stahl et al., 1978, 1980, 1981), and in several foreign countries, including Canada (Cotton, 1981). The major finding of these studies is that the modal modern soldier seems to be motivated by considerations that are in part institutional or normative and in part occupational or rationalistic. In addition, there may be a trend in the occupational direction. Equally interesting from a sociology of knowledge perspective is the fact that all of the United States military services have recently designed programs that explicitly attempt to reduce the occupational orientation and reaffirm the institutional nature of military service (Moskos, 1982).

In an effort to base Moskos' thesis on a reasonable foundation, Segal (1986) tried to provide a theoretical meaning to the I/O thesis by departing from the rationalization theme in the social arena. Segal again underlined the I/O thesis assertion following the USA's transition to professional military service (i.e., an all-volunteer military force).

So, how is the I/O thesis positioned when it comes to Turkey? This article attempts to focus on this issue. While Turkey has exhibited development in concordance with many of the sub-titles Segal indicated to have emerged in the social area while addressing the phenomenon of rationalization, it has also created a different landscape by maintaining its compulsory military service.

The I/O typology is not presented as a mechanistic explanation of social change in military systems. Because organizational changes are difficult to capture, observers must avoid simplifying schemes that distort even as they illuminate. The I/O approach must not simply ask, "What is the direction of change?" as important as that question is, but also, "How are these changes defined?" The latter query allows us to move beyond the institutional-versus-occupational dichotomy to examine the different degrees of institutional and occupational aspects and see where they are in opposition to each other as well as where they manifest jointly. Such a dynamic approach comprehends not merely an either/or situation but a shifting constellation of institutional and occupational features in armed forces (Moskos, 1986, p. 382).

While Turkey complies with the institutional model regarding many of the considerations Moskos had used for comparison, it also has certain characteristics

within the framework Moskos defined as the occupational model. To contribute to previous comparative studies, this article is based on the modalities applied in these relevant comparative studies. These modalities are “legitimacy and societal regard”, “level of compensation”, “residence”, “unionization”, and “civilianization”.

### **Armed Forces: Relations and Trends**

Changes in the perception of security after the Cold War deeply affected Turkey just as much as Western countries. However, decision makers’ opinions that Turkey had turned from a sideline country into a frontline country during this period and the internal threat factor coming increasingly to the forefront overshadowed the need for structural change and transition in the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) similar to the Western militaries and, although not being the sole reason, caused plans in this direction to be postponed. TAF is comprised these days of professional soldiers in its core crew and continues to be an institution weighted by compulsory personnel in terms of quality. However, this structure is rapidly changing in parallel with the struggle against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and political decision makers’ administration of this process as well as the ratio of professional soldiers in the general population within TAF have been gradually increasing.

“Military service is the right and responsibility of every Turk.” How this service is to be performed or considered performed in the armed forces or in the public sector is regulated by law. The practice of compulsory military service as described by these aforementioned statements in Article 72 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey is deemed compulsory for every male national of the Republic of Turkey. Apart from the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Commands, which are considered semi-military forces, the total labor force of the TAF as of 2012 was 504,000 persons, 316,000 of whom are compulsory personnel; as of 2018 was 476,836 persons, and as of 2019 was 126,500 volunteer forces. As of 2016, the professionals (159,690) constitute approximately 42 to 45 percent of the combined Army/Navy/Air Force, the Gendarmerie, and the total TAF. In the much smaller Coast Guard, professionals account for 61 percent of the total (Cakatay, 2019, p. 27).

The various types of military service in Turkey were most recently regulated on June 23, 2003. Accordingly, male nationals of the Turkish Republic who are eligible for military service are enrolled in one of the following services: a 12-month reserve officer, a 6-month short-term private/petty officer, a 15-month private/petty officer, or military service as a foreign exchange opportunity. “The most recent paid military service exemption law came into force on the 3rd of August, 2018 with eligibility assigned to those born before January 1, 1994. Thus, men who were born before this date were eligible, whereas men born on January 1, 1994 or thereafter were ineligible. The final date to apply for this paid military service exemption was the November 4,

2018 with a payment of 15,000 Turkish Liras, as announced by the Turkish Ministry of Defense. According to exchange rates of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, this amount equals approximately \$2,700 in U.S. currency (Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, n.d.). For comparison, Table 9 shows the cut-off ages, the amount of exemption fees (in U.S. dollars), and the estimated revenue for the temporary exemption laws between 1987 and 2018.” (Cakatay, 2019, p. 35–36). The milestone of operations toward professionalism in the TAF is the Specialized Sergeant Law (Law No. 3269 enacted March 25, 1986).

The most recent step taken toward professionalism in the TAF is the Contracted Private and Petty Officer Law (Law #6191 enacted March 22, 2011). This law’s preamble underlines that specialized sergeants are enrolled in continuous technical and critical places of duty; however, after many years of experience, personnel over 30 are understood to show decreased efficiency, especially in duties requiring physical force. Privates and petty officers with the status of compulsory personnel were also indicated as a significant negative aspect to be enrolled in internal security units following their 3-month basic military training and then to be disbanded during their most productive period after finally getting acquainted with the region and gaining full experience in combatting terrorism. In this context, the aim with the Contracted Private and Petty Officer Law is to compensate for the deficit in personnel trained to combat terrorism in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions by planning to employ contracted personnel who’ve received good training and have the status of professional soldier instead of compulsory privates and petty officers.

The Ministry of National Defense and TAF announced the initial enlistment of 5,103 contracted private soldiers following the enactment of the Contracted Private and Petty Officer Law. While 17,827 persons preliminarily registered within the framework of the announcement, only 503 went on to become contracted privates. The second announcement called for the enlistment of 10,649 contracted privates and received preliminary registrations from 13,858 persons. Only 453 of these went on to become contracted privates in this second announcement. In the third and final enlistment, the announcement called for 10,035 contracted privates, of whom 432 persons succeeded. As can be seen here, this situation has fallen way below expectations.

## **The Variables of the Institutional/Occupational Thesis**

### ***Legitimacy and Societal Regard***

The TAF is perceived as an institutionalized, trusted, sought-after, and consulted organization (Pehlivan, 2009). The factors affecting this conclusion may include the role the military has had in establishing the Turkish Republic, its tendency to act in awareness of the fact that the protection and safeguarding mission it has drawn for

itself imposes liabilities as well as privileges, the various characteristics of the social structure, democratic politics, and the weakness of non-governmental organizations.

Many authors have addressed the political autonomy of the Turkish Armed Forces, its privileged position that challenges civil inspection, and the factors effective at this point (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1997; Hale, 1994). I will not repeat these arguments here but do believe the mission to protect and safeguard the State of the Turkish Republic as assigned to Turkish officers during their training and period of professional socialization is important to emphasize.

Understanding the political and social environment that drags soldiers into democratic politics in various ways is undoubtedly important. As frequently encountered, especially in academic literature (Nielsen, 2012), however, explaining this phenomenon by pushing the corporate or ideological characteristics of the military to the background (i.e., the intellectual equipment that forces soldiers to military intervention) would mean overlooking an important part of the picture.

Young cadets who are accepted into military academies after a strict elimination process are remolded with the idea that their principal duty is to “protect and safeguard” the State of the Turkish Republic from day one and are encouraged to think and act in line with this throughout their professional lives. The main objects of this mission (i.e., the headlines of the stack of values to be protected) are state authority, indivisible unity of the country, and the principle of secularism. As can be understood from the principle of secularism being listed among this poem of values, the TKS not only confines itself to undertaking responsibility for external security but also perceives itself to be the main owner/conveyor of the mission of Republican Westernization/modernization (Demirel, 2002).

Being a soldier as the principal keeper of the continuity of the state is taught as meaning guardianship of the country and the state and distinguishes being a soldier from other professions; the TAF is also taught to hold a separate and privileged place in Turkish history.

Most of the values that provided and describe the distinguishing color to Turkish society are associated with the military and military activities. Among the examples that initially come to mind are statements such as military-nation and military, home of the prophet, glorious soldier farewell ceremonies, the profile of an officer in uniform as the ideal groom in old Turkish cinema, the dad touring in the city to celebrate his son getting accepted into a military school, male children being photographed in their military uniforms, some disabled youth’s willingness to serve in the military even if just for one day, and parents playing the drums at the funeral of their son killed during his military service (Canveren, 2021).

TKS appears as an institution that successfully realizes the missions it undertakes. The common opinion is found that the TAF has satisfactory war power, armament, and labor force, despite its indispensable deficiencies. Many of the incidents perceived as accomplishments in recent Turkish history are comprised of military achievements (e.g., the Turkish War of Independence, the Korean War, the Cyprus Conflict).

Furthermore, the TAF has managed to present the image of an institution that minimizes influential contacts and favoritism, that is removed from partisanship, and that is located at the highest point in terms of institutionalization for an important section of Turkish society. The strategic personnel planning and promotion system of TAF is asserted to be structured for bringing worthiness to the forefront and to be updated alongside the changing conditions.

The society's perception of the TAF has not changed much, even today. In my eyes, a reason exists for using the word "even." Large scale charges have been pressed against many people including the Chiefs of General Staff for conducting or attempting to conduct military coups or establishing illegal organizations in recent years. Despite this, research observes the TAF to be the most trusted institution. I will address a few studies in this respect.

Studies conducted by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) in 2000 and 2004 stated that, while trust in the military was 77% in 2000, it had increased to 82% in 2004 (Çarkoğlu & Adaman, 2000). The study conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres Marketing Research Company (TNS Piar; 2008 as cited in Pehlivan, 2009) also stated 87% of the participants to have answered the question of who was the most trusted institution as the military. Lastly, the results from the study the BİLGESAM, conducted in 2013, implemented a questionnaire over 5,173 participants, and one question measured trust in the TAF alongside trust in the Parliament, Government, Jurisdiction, and Police Department. Their findings indicated trust in the TAF to be at 63.9% and to be higher than all other institutions. The trust scores for the other four institutions are 50% for Police Department, 43.9% for Government, 39.2% for Parliament, and 38.5% for Jurisdiction (Akyürek & Yılmaz, 2013).

Among the questions regarding the different dimensions of the military-nation gap, while the opinion "I think the command echelon at TKS is unknown to the public" received 64.7% support, the opinion "TAF sees itself superior to other public institutions" scored 61.6% support, the opinion "Soldiers see themselves as superior to society" received 57%, and the opinion "I believe the TAF has taken important steps in the recent period for public relations and integration with the society" scored at 50.7% (Akyürek & Yılmaz, 2013).

The questionnaire also included questions about compulsory military service. The opinion "Compulsory military service practice should be terminated and transitioned

to a professional army” received the highest support score at 65.4% (Akyürek & Yılmaz, 2013).

The findings indicate the Turkish Armed Forces to be criticized in many aspects. Although trust in TAF was observed to have relatively decreased due to the effects from developments in recent years as well as destructive debates positioning TAF at the center, the institution has a much higher trust level than other institutions.

Trust in TAF being at a considerably high level indicates the scene people would like to see, not the institution they observe despite all their criticism. These findings also indicate that, in spite of developments and changes in recent years, people from every segment of TAF are positioned at a more distinguished and special place compared to other public institutions.

### ***Basis, Mode and Level of Compensation***

Not many major differences are observed between the wages of Turkish Armed Forces members and the civil sector. This can certainly appear deceptive when taking the basic salary as the basis because many types of cash and noncash compensations exist for TAF personnel. The most significant ones are food, accommodation, family allowances, regional cost of living adjustments, and income from its own economic subsidiaries such as the Armed Forces Pension Fund (OYAK).

TAF has all of the noncash compensation modes Moskos described for the institutional model as well as many/some cash compensation modes. TAF’s most important unit as a financial resource for cash compensations is OYAK, which has also been debated by many recently. OYAK was established by law in 1961 right after the first military coup in the history of the Republic on May 27, 1960. OYAK is subordinate to the Military of National Defense, subject to private law provisions, and a financially and administratively autonomous legal entity running TAF members’ solidarity and pension fund (Akça, 2004).

Within the social security system set forth by Turkey’s Constitution of 1961, OYAK provides assurances for its members apart from the main social security institutions (i.e., State Retirement Fund, Social Security System [SSI]).

The State has exempted OYAK Holding from corporate tax and granted it a special right not granted for other state economic enterprises. Some consider this to be a state contribution to OYAK and claim this condition to distort competition for companies engaged in the same business.

OYAK Holding is registered in Ankara and has 28 subsidiaries engaged in the finance, industry, and service areas through 60 sub-companies. When considering its

activities, OYAK is an armed forces savings institution and an additional social security and service institution, as well as a holding institution, all at the same time.

As an additional social security institution, OYAK's services as prescribed by law are divided into social allowances and social services. Social allowances are comprised of pensions and death/disablement benefits granted to members in return for membership contributions (Akça, 2004; Köktürk, 2021).

The activities OYAK executes under social services (i.e., social purpose investments) are based on the principle of granting cheaper and longer-term credits to its members compared to the market, as well as to provide a certain level of income for the institution. The aim of these services is to allow military personnel to live a life at a wealth level equivalent to the upper class. Among OYAK's subsidiaries, 12 were listed in 1999 among the top 500 industrial organizations of Turkey, and nine in 2001; five of its companies were listed among the top 50 organizations with the highest profit levels in 2000 and 2001 (Akça, 2004).

The first impression of OYAK as a phenomenon clearly is that it takes the members of the military into a bourgeoisie-fiction process using numerous financial income distribution mechanisms, drawing them into sterile mid-class lives. As a result of this effect, the daily life practices of individual military members have become disconnected from the lower-class segments of society and become more integrated with the upper-middle classes.

OYAK paid compensation pensions of around \$400,000 for full generals, \$300,000 for lieutenant generals, \$250,000 for major generals and \$200,000 for brigadier generals who retired in 2012. In addition to the above figures, admirals also received small pension compensation figures from the state. These figures are significant when compared to the pension compensations received by flag officers from the state. A full general is paid \$400,000 by OYAK but receives \$50,000 from the state as pension compensation ("Paşaların emekli ikramiyesi biliyor musunuz?", 2013).

Certain improvements are planned to be made in the currently arranged Turkish Armed Forces Personnel Law. As an example, new practices are being planned such as reduced wait times for promotions, rent allowances for those living outside military posts and lodgings, increased wages and seniority benefits for graduate officers, overtime payments, security compensation, commandship compensation, and authority compensation.

### ***Residence and Facilities***

One of the most important noncash compensations provided for TKS personnel is lodging. The concept of lodging arose from public officers' need for a residence during



the final period of the Ottoman Empire and came to the forefront for TAF with regard to the Ministry of National Defense following the military coup in 1960. Currently, the Ministry of National Defense has around 42,000 houses, while the General Command of Gendarmerie has around 20,000. These houses are located within military quarters in certain regions and outside military quarters in others. Detached luxury homes are also provided for high-ranking officers.

These houses are architecturally designed as gated communities and are closed to the outer civilian world. These houses are protected by military security officers and have check-point access. In other words, the civilian population has restricted controlled access to entering military lodgings. Talking about a social group called the “military class” becomes possible as a result of this segregation. This class has high economic status in terms of the economic opportunities OYAK provides.

Certain lodgings have social facilities such as shopping centers and schools. These houses are free or rented to officers in return for very low lease payments. Initiatives have begun to make legal regulations that provide rent allowances for officers who are unable to benefit from lodging. One of the reasons for such initiatives is that the state is willing to sell all public institution houses. However, when considering that only 108 houses have been sold in the last 10 years, this is considered least likely to pose any short-term danger.

Aside from providing economic income, these lodgings naturally allow these families to socialize among themselves. The daily lives of the officers’ spouses are mostly shaped at these places. The testimonies from women living in military houses have indicated the same hierarchy that exists between officers to be applicable between these officers’ spouses, and all daily relations are structured according to this hierarchy. No academic output has yet to be provided on military lodging, let alone any sociological study.

In addition to residences, the services the military provides at other institutions such as officers’ clubs, military mess halls, and summer camps are either free or provided at very low costs that are incomparable with the civilian sphere.

Compulsory soldiers being employed in these aforementioned military institutions made TAF a target of criticism once the public found out that the number of soldiers employed at military institutions is around 230,000. For this reason, privatization of these institutions or employing personnel from the civilian population began to be talked about. Pilot programs are currently being applied in this respect. However, initiatives will certainly be started regarding demilitarization or the transfer of certain duties to civilian officers in the upcoming period. I would like to finish my presentation with the topic of unionization as a direct extension of demilitarization for Turkey.

### *Unionization*

One important consequence Moskos saw resulting from the hypothesized shift from institution to occupation is the formation of military unions. Some countries have long-standing arrangements for members of the armed forces to join associations that represent their interests. Several other states have granted this right in recent years. In a number of countries, however, the unionization of military personnel has been viewed as conflicting with the unique nature of the military and its role in maintaining national security and public order.

TAF members are prohibited from establishing or becoming a member of a union. Restrictions were brought against TAF personnel's union rights in terms of forming associations through the 1982 Constitution, Labor Law No. 2821, and the Public Officers Labor Law No. 4688. As a result of court cases against Turkey due to these restrictions, the European Court of Human Rights sentenced TAF and forced them to pay compensation. TAF personnel forming unions or similar associations is still considered a remote possibility. At the same time, the decision by the Constitutional Court in 2013 revoked the provision in the Public Officers Union and Collective Bargaining Law No. 4688, which set forth that civilian "officers" employed as staff at the Ministry of National Defense and Turkish Armed Forces cannot form unions or become union members. Based on this, the Union for Public Officers Employed at Military Workplaces (ASİM-SEN) was established in July 2013. The number of persons within this scope is about 55,000, as announced by TAF in 2012.

### **Conclusion**

These changes are not sufficient enough yet for considering TAF to be transitioning from the institution model to the occupation model. Although the demilitarization of various organizations and employees, union rights being granted only to civilian employees, and the practices for contracted privates and petty officers are indicative of an occupational model, the best definition of the current situation might be that of a "pragmatic professionalism." The transition from compulsory military service to an all-volunteer force will need to be waited for in order to have all these processes become clearer. When will this happen? What will the possibilities and opportunities be in this regard? Clear and distinct answers to these questions have not been sufficiently considered yet for Turkey.

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