

# ORTADOĞU'DA ORDU VE SİYASET

*Edited by Veysel Kurt*

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Politics in the Middle East and its relation with the military have long been questioning in the literature of international relations, especially in the last half of the century. Countries in the region have been overcoming various types of difficulties after they obtain their sovereignty. While the Middle Eastern countries' governmental structures have been shaped in various ways, the military usually got a great influence in those structures. The book titled *Ortadoğu'da Ordu ve Siyaset* focuses on that structural position of the military.

The editor points out that the authors prefer to use the concept of "military and politics" instead of using "civil-military relations", due to the former indicates a significant point of the effectiveness of the military in domestic politics and foreign policies. While the concept of "civil-military relations" reflects a formal and institutional relationship between the two and allows examinations more likely on procedural relations between them, the concept of "military and politics" provides a better understanding on the role of the military, which is takes place at the heart of the politics. In this respect, the book examines the importance and effectiveness of the military in the political processes by studying several Middle Eastern states, such as Iran, Israel, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

Each chapter tries to reveal how the military has become institutionalized and what kind of interrelated structure have been built up with politics in the Middle East. The book also considers the reaction of the militaries during the Arab

**Merve Dilek  
Dağdelen**

Reviewed by,  
Marmara University.

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Spring as a significant indicator for the role of the military in domestic politics. In this respect, strong ties and transitions between political and military elites are regarded as the key element for each chapter.

In the first chapter, Hakkı Uygur examines competitive military forces in Iran. He analyses the relations between the military and politics by considering the economic and military strength of the Revolutionary Guards and its effects on both Iran's domestic and foreign policies. Muhammed Mustafa Kulu, in the second chapter, investigates the Israeli army. He demonstrates the social and economic sources of the military in the country, and its considerable impact on political and governmental issues. The third chapter, which written by Mohammed Moussa, explicates the military's autonomous position against politics and its effect on politics in Egypt. Moussa designates the changes and continuities of the role of the military by dividing the historical processes into three periods. The first period begins with the Strike of Free Officers in 1952; the second period started with the demolition of Mubarak in 2011, and the third period adverts the 2013 military coup and the following developments in Egypt's domestic politics. Moussa reveals the social and political domains of the military in all three periods. The following chapter, by Ömer Aslan, stresses the great role of the military, which cannot be ignored, in gaining sovereignty of Algeria. Aslan highlights the dominance of the military over the politics by citing from Eva Bellin and states that "every state has an army but in Algeria the army has a state."<sup>1</sup> Talha Abdulrazaq, in the fifth chapter, explains the unexpected change in the role of the Iraqi army after the U.S. invasion in 2003. Abdulrazaq argues that the rise of the Iraqi nation-state and the rise of Iraqi army rooted in the same source and it is almost impossible to examine the politics in Iraq without mentioning the military. The chapter ahead, which written by the editor Veysel Kurt, describes the French effect on the Syrian army and politics after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Kurt claims that the military and a series of military coups between 1946 and 1970 shaped the power politics in Syria. He affirms that the 1970 military coup did not only lead to a change in the key actors, it also led to the reconstruction of both the regime and the military. He conveys his ideas about the current situation of Syria and concerns on the reconstruction of political and military mechanisms after the expected peace in the country as well. The next chapter by Abdullah Erboğa portrays rather a different context for Saudi Arabia. Erboğa asserts that the political elites hold complete control over all areas of power in Saudi Arabia. The Suud family, as Erboğa conveys, does not allow any other competitor who may rival

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism Comparative Perspective", *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No: 2, (January 2004), p. 143. Originally cited from Mohammad Harbi, cited in *Le Soir de Bruxelles*, Jan. 11, 2002.

their authority. Therefore there is not any proper mechanism or institution for the military, but the Suud family subsidizes the country's security forces with the high level of oil income. When it is compared with the other states which mentioned above, Erboğa describes a reverse relation between the military and politics in Saudi Arabia. While the military intervenes in politics in other countries as in Iran or Egypt, the political elites lead and intervene in the military of Saudi Arabia. In the last chapter, Ömer Aslan analyses Pakistan that has similarities with Turkey, especially concerning the role of the military on the gaining the nation's sovereignty. Aslan studies the relation between military and politics and the rise and fall of the Pakistani army. He sorts several reasons for the withdrawal of the military from politics in the last part of the chapter.

It is mentioned throughout the book that the modernization process in the Middle Eastern countries was carried out by the army. In addition to this, a large portion of the revenues which obtained from the natural sources is allocated to defense expenditures. These two have leads to the efficiency of the military over politics. On the other hand, Veysel Kurt underlines the false promises of the literature for the political changes and improvements in the Middle Eastern countries after the *Arab Spring*. However, as Kurt says, the process showed that any change in the region would not happen without suffering. Besides, although the fact that the military's domination of politics is common in almost all the Middle Eastern states, their response to the *Arab Spring* has been different from each other. Kurt asserts that the dominance of the militaries over politics will continue in the Middle East. For this reason, it can be said that the book addresses a prominent subject in the literature. The editor also concludes, the fate of countries which will reform and/or reconstruct their militaries, like Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, will be shaped, in a great extent, by the efforts of national and international actors over the national militaries. In this respect, militaries in the Middle Eastern countries are and will be central actors and/or primary elements for the reconstruction of the relations between military and politics, and the future of the region.

The book *Ortadoğu'da Ordu ve Siyaset* falls short to cover a number of relationships, which is conducting independently from the political institutions, between the militaries and the international actors. However, it is so noteworthy that the book examines many countries in the context of a very popular topic that the relations between military and politics. In this respect, this book is such a valuable source, especially for Turkish literature.