

## CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE AK PARTY ERA (2002–2021): SO-CALLED EFFORTS FOR DEPOLITICISATION

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### *Abstract*

*The Turkish army's role in politics has always been a controversial case for democratisation. Yet, the events of the AK Party rule (2002–2021) have witnessed unprecedented developments in this regard. In its first term, the AK Party carried out important civil–military reforms that were essential for a democratic civil–military framework. However, the optimistic environment that existed in the very beginning was later broken through a number of events, including the 2007 'e-memorandum', the Ergenekon trials and the 15 July attempted coup by the Gülenist religious community (FETÖ). Some measures were taken following these developments, such as adopting the presidential system in a referendum that was carried out in 2017. Also, the state of emergency rules (OHAL – Olağanüstü Hal Kararları) were introduced, which brought important amendments regarding civil–military relations to increase a civilian monitoring over the military to eliminate Gülenists. Yet, several claims are made about the gradual penetration of other Islamist groups replacing the vacated positions of the Gülenists as well as excessive civilian control by denying Huntington's objective and professional model. At this point, by relying on the above-mentioned allegations, this paper aims to understand if there is democratic depoliticisation in the military as assumed by Huntington's objective model. Or rather, is there an increasing Islamisation within the military that enables the AK Party to subordinate it into its reputed partisan interests by making it a mirror of the ruling party as assumed by the subjective model of Huntington.*

**Keywords:** *Civil-Military Relations in Turkey, AK Party Rule, 15 July, Subjective Control, Depoliticisation*

## AK PARTİ DÖNEMİNDE SİVİL-ASKER İLİŞKİLERİ (2002-2021) DEPOLİTİKLEŞME ÇABALARI

### *Öz*

*Türk ordusunun siyaset üzerindeki etkisi demokratikleşme açısından daima tartışılan bir konu olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, AK Parti (2002-2021) döneminde daha önce görülmemiş bazı gelişmeler meydana gelmiştir. İlk döneminde, AK Parti, demokratik bir sivil-asker modeli oluşturmak adına önemli reformlar yaptı. Fakat,*

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*en başlardaki bu iyimser gelişmeler, daha sonra yaşanan bir dizi olayın -2007 'e-muhıtıra', Ergenekon soruşturmaları ve Fetullah Gülen cemaatinin darbe teşebbüsü-yaşanmasıyla kesintiye uğradı. Bu olayları müteakip sivillerin askerler üzerindeki denetimini arttırabilmek ve Gülen örgütüne mensup olan kişileri ordudan temizleyebilmek için bir dizi önlem alındı. 2017 referandumuyla başkanlık sistemine geçilmesini ve Olağanüstü Hal Kararları (OHAL) uygulamalarını bu bağlamda değerlendirebiliriz. Fakat, Gülencilerden boşalan yerlerin, aşamalı olarak, diğer İslami gruplar tarafından doldurulmakta olduğu ve ayrıca OHAL uygulamalarının da gereğinden fazla bir sivil denetim sağlama yoluna giderek Huntington'ın nesnel modelini ve profesyonellik tanımlamasını ihlal ettiği yolunda eleştiriler vardır. Bu bağlamda, bahsedilen noktalardan hareketle, bu makalede Huntington'ın tanımladığı gibi demokratik bir nesnel kontrole yani bir depolitikleşmeye mi gidilmekte olduğu; yoksa artan bir İslamileşme yoluyla, Huntington'ın öznel modelinde iddia edildiği gibi, ordunun AK Parti'ye tümüyle bağımlı bir parti ordusu haline mi getirilmeye çalışıldığı tartışılacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Türkiye'de Sivil-Asker İlişkileri, AK Parti Yönetimi, 15 Temmuz, Öznel Kontrol, Depolitikleşme*

### **Introduction**

The Turkish military is generally referred to as a reformist army because of the role that it played during the foundation of secular Turkey. The basis of this reformist identity dates back to the latter years of the Ottoman Empire, especially after the opening of modern military schools and academies, where new officers were trained in a more positivist and secular environment. Periodically, the young officers were sent to Europe, and European officers were hired by the Turkish military academies. This would bring about a mental transformation among the young officers. They became critical of the current regime by becoming aware that a secular transformation was needed to adapt the empire to global politics. Indeed, many believed that this line of secularisation could only be achieved under the leadership of the military. This would bring increased politicisation. The officer class played a leading role in the 1908 Young Turk Revolution when the monarchical regime was replaced with a constitutional one. As the guardians of the regime, the military's influence in politics would continue. Between the years 1919 and 1922, under the leadership of General Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish Army organised the Turkish Liberation War and established present-day Turkey. Until Atatürk's death in 1938, a series of reforms officially made Turkey a secular state that directed her face to modern liberal Western regimes. After Atatürk's death, the military claimed a protective role for the secular regime, especially against potential religious fundamentalism (İrtica) by making periodic coup d'états in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. (For the impact of conservatism on the Turkish people, for instance see Karagül, 2019, p. 12-13). However, with the AK Party rule (2002–2021) and the course of various events, the Turkish military's current situation regarding depoliticisation or Islamisation became controversial. Indeed, the failed coup attempt on 15 July, 2016, by the Fethullah Terrorist

Organisation (FETÖ) or Parallel State Structure (PYD)<sup>1</sup> indicated that the secular dynamics of the army had already been eroded and a considerable number of Islamist (in this case, Gülenist) officers had penetrated the army. Although, the AK Party government removed a significant number of Gülenists, there were claims that the vacant positions were filled with AK Party sympathisers or the officers who were members of other religious communities (cemaat). If this assumption is true, the military's depoliticisation goes hand-in-hand with increasing Islamisation. At this point, to understand whether the assumption is correct or not, the military's recent past, current status and possible future outcomes should be broadly analysed. When I observed the literature, I considered that there are not enough articles that analysed the Turkish military's current status between depoliticisation and Islamisation. Thus, this article aims to discuss what the possible impacts of the current situation might be.

At this point, we should note that normally, to understand the Turkish military's ongoing relationship with Turkish politics, one should indeed start the analysis from the latter centuries of the Ottoman Empire. Although the limited scope of this paper does not allow us to conduct a broad analysis, it should be necessary to explain the military's politicisation process before the AK Party's era to understand why organisations, such as the FETÖ, were tolerated. Hence, in the very beginning, the Turkish military's former perennial role as the founder of the republic and the guardian of secularism should be considered. After emphasising this essential point, we will analyse key events of the AK Party by asking did it aim to depoliticise the army or did it try to eliminate the officers who were against its political views by replacing left-secular-oriented officers with Islamist ones? Could this be the main reason behind the AK Party's former tolerance of the FETÖ infiltration and the emergence of other Islamist groups? At this point, we may suggest two different hypotheses. If the first scenario is true, the AK Party's purpose is to depoliticise the army. If this happens, Turkey may strengthen its democracy through military depoliticisation as assumed by Huntington's objective control model, and the military's secular dynamics will be preserved. In this way, the military becomes professionalised and maintains its political neutrality, which will also increase its combat prowess. If the second scenario is true, the AK Party's purpose is to eliminate opposing officers by replacing them with ones closer to the Islamist groups. This would naturally have very negative outcomes, as happened in the 15 July attempted coup. Although that attempt failed, it is assumed that the AK Party maintains a similar strategy this time by tolerating other Islamist groups. We aim to explain the risks of this strategy with Huntington's subjective control model, which divides the army, erodes its professionalisation and makes it a

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<sup>1</sup> In further sections of the paper, we occasionally refer to this terrorist organisation as the Fethullah Organisation or the Gülenist Organisation. The examples on the following pages, especially the attempted coup on 15 July, are sufficient to understand the terrorist intentions of this organisation.

mirror of the ruling party. This situation does not only reduce the military's combat prowess but makes the regime vulnerable to threats by the emergence of non-hierarchical juntaist establishments, again, as happened in the 15 July attempted coup. In the following sections, I will discuss these two different scenarios and their different dimensions. To give the analysis a theoretical framework, again, the key events will be argued in the analysis section using Huntington's objective and subjective control models.<sup>2</sup> After discussing the possibilities by avoiding sharp judgments, we will make our main inferences in the conclusion.

## **1. THE TURKISH MILITARY AS THE SO-CALLED PIONEER OF MODERNISM AND SECULARISM**

In this section of the paper, we aim to give a very short summary of civil–military relations. As mentioned previously in the introduction, the military culturally absorbed a reformist identity, especially after the foundation of modern military schools during the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century (Zürcher, 2017, p. 38). This modernist trend encouraged officers to become involved in politics by finally forcing the Sultan to declare a constitutional monarchy in 1908 (Berkes, 2018, p. 404). After suppressing the 31 March riot by the monarchists, the military became 'the guardian of constitutional regime and liberation' (Nigehbanı Meşrutiyet ve Hürriyet) (see Köseoğlu, 2013).<sup>3</sup> Even during that period, the military was deeply politicised with the emergence of different groups, such as Mektepli (officers from school) and Alaylı (officers from rank) and İttihatçı (supporters of Union and Progress – İttihat ve Terakki) and İtilafçı (supporters of Freedom and Accord – Hürriyet ve İtilaf) (Zürcher, 2017, p. 76; Dünya Bülteni, 2012; Aydemir, 1971, p. 339–340). One of the main reasons for the defeats in the Balkan Wars was the collapse of discipline because of this strong politicisation (Dünya Bülteni, 2012; Aydemir, 1971, p. 347; for collapsed discipline, see Çakmak, 2018, p. 166). Some officers, such as Mustafa Kemal, objected to the politicisation of the military by demanding that they quit political parties (Bayar, 2018, p. 517). Similar divisions within the military continued to exist during the Republican era. Naturally, during the AK Party's term, we might observe examples of these divisions as discussed in detail in further sections.

At any case, this guardianship duty later evolved into the 'guardianship of secularism' after the foundation of the secular Turkish Republic. The Republic of Turkey was founded after the War of Liberation in the remaining lands of the Ottoman Empire (1919–1922) under the leadership of the abovementioned officer (later Marshal and Commander in Chief), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The founder of Republic Kemal Atatürk's

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<sup>2</sup> After explaining events up to the 15 July attempted coup, the current situation and possible future scenarios are outlined in section 3, 'Analysis: Subjective Model and the AK Party's Policies'. The analysis section is intentionally linked to later parts of the paper to connect pre-, during and post-15 July events using Huntington's subjective model.

<sup>3</sup> Page number is not available.

secular reforms included equality of men and women before the law, the adoption of a Western style of dress, the adoption of the Latin alphabet and the replacement of the words ‘the state religion is Islam’ in the constitution with a new article stipulating that ‘Turkey is a secular state’. Voting rights for women and a number of other secular and Western-orientated reforms were introduced, and Turkish military culture was deeply embedded with secularism principles. Therefore, after Atatürk, the military intervened in the regime with coup d’états by claiming guardianship for the secular regime (or guardianship of Kemalism).<sup>4</sup> The interventions include the 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 interventions. During these interventions, the military authorities created two constitutions in 1961 and 1982 and implemented further instructions to ostensibly protect the secular regime.

With constitutional amendments, the military gained a strong monitoring power over state affairs. The creation of the National Security Council (NSC) as a civilian–military mixed institution resulted in the military being a consultative body to the government who would give them information regarding issues based on national security (Ahmad, 2017, p. 156). However, after each intervention, the military increased its legal powers in its favour. Eventually, the NSC became a military-dominated body that made vital decisions regarding the future of the state, as could be seen in the 28 February incident (for the power of the NSC after the 1980 interventions, see Karpat, 2015, p. 299). Furthermore, the military made a new regulation in its Internal Service Law by adding Article 35, which stipulates: ‘The duty of the military is to safeguard the territorial integrity and the nature of the Republic, which is defined by the Constitution’ (CNN Türk, 2013). In 1961, the Turkish Armed Forces Assistance and Pension Fund (OYAK) was founded to give military personnel some priorities in the Turkish social insurance system, to provide social security to military personnel and to enable the military to become involved in the business and industry sectors (Jacoby, 2003, p. 676–677). The OYAK became one of the largest conglomerates in the country by providing high shares to military investors. The generals became a privileged, elite group in Turkish society, and their destiny was no longer connected to the party leaders but to the regime itself (Ahmad, 2017, p. 22). While the military was increasing its influence with these regulations, there was an observable division within the military between more leftist anti-Americanist and status-quoist (NATO supporters and Americanist) officers (for a discussion on this division, see Akyaz, 2009, p. 234, 287–301; also, see Bilbilik, 2013, p. 150–151). On 9 March 1971 left-orientated officers intended to execute a coup d’état, but they were unsuccessful (Bilbilik, 2013, p. 144–145). Three days after the

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<sup>4</sup> Kemalism, or Kemalist ideology (sometimes referred to as Atatürkism), refers to the protection and continuation of the progressive ideals of Atatürk and his regime. (For instance see Hürriyet, 2020). The military’s role in the guardianship of secularism was sometimes defined as the guardianship of Kemalism. (Topçu, 2008). Throughout the text, we occasionally use the expression ‘Kemalism’, but we mostly use ‘guardianship of secularism’.

unsuccessful coup attempt, on 12 March 1971, the other NATO-favoured (status-quo) group issued a communiqué to the president demanding that the government resign. If he refused, the military would resort to non-democratic measures, leaving prime minister Süleyman Demirel with no other choice but to retire (Ahmad, 2017, p. 176). Therefore, the 1971 intervention can be defined as more indirect compared to the previous one in 1960. Following the 1971 intervention, several leftist officers were eliminated from the military (Akyaz, 2009, p. 298–299; Kayalı, 2015, p. 185). Indeed, starting with the 1971 intervention, the military adopted a more oppressive and intolerant attitude towards individual rights and freedoms (Aydemir, 2014, p. 50; Zürcher, 2017, p. 262–263). This attitude came to its peak with the 1980 coup d'état when the military directly took over and went to a junta period, which would continue until 1983. By creating the aforementioned 1982 Constitution, the military limited most of the individual rights that had been given to the people in the 1961 Constitution and increased the authoritarian character of the state (Tachau and Heper, 1983, p. 28–29; Zürcher, 2017, p. 286). Additionally, the junta leaders' decision to assign Turgut Özal, the designer of liberal 24 January decisions who was known as a politician favouring liberalisation in the economy, proved the military's intention of creating a more capitalist economy in parallel with American policies (Özçelik, 2009, p. 77–78).

Indeed, the ostensible reason for all of the military interventions was to protect Atatürk's principles and secularism; but the results of the intervention were different. For instance, during the 1980–83 junta, the junta leaders promoted Turkish–Islam synthesis to presumably counterbalance the increasing leftist movement (Zürcher, 2017, p. 293). Compulsory religious courses were added to the curriculum, and the leader of the junta, Kenan Evren, publicly read passages from the Quran (Zürcher, 2017, p. 293; KESK, 2015). All of these implementations were made under the guardianship of secularism. Nevertheless, especially after the end of the Cold War and with the rise of political Islam and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorist organisation, the military adopted more sensitive rhetoric regarding the protection of secularism and national unity (Cansever and Kiriş, 2015, p. 375). It appears that the 28 February 1997 coup was the result of the military's secular concerns because, after the NSC meeting on 28 February 1997, the military issued the government an ultimatum (officially 'advice') demanding the implementation of a long list of decisions, all of which were taken to stop the rise of political Islam and protect the secular regime (Zürcher, 2017, p. 323–324). Therefore, Zürcher titled this event 'Kemalist restoration' (Zürcher, 2017, p. 323). Similar to 1971, this coup seemed indirect but caused the government to dissolve and eventually resign (Zürcher, 1997, p. 324). Therefore, the intervention was also defined as a 'post-modern coup' as the military did not take over directly (Vatan, 2021). The assumed representative of political Islam, the Refah (Welfare) Party, was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998

(Vatan, 2021). Forty-one former Refah Party deputies founded the Fazilet (Virtue) Party, but this was also closed down because it was accused of being a direct continuation of the Refah Party. After the two parties were closed down, the Islamist movement was divided into two separate sects as conservatives and modernists. The AK Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party) was founded by this so-called modernist wing that aimed to adopt a more centre-right line by leaving its Islamist rhetoric (Zürcher, 1997, p. 325–327). The AK Party founder and leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had been in prison in 1999 for inciting antagonism by considering religious differences (Milliyet, 1998). Therefore, while the AK Party came to power after the 2002 elections, the military had an unchallenged image regarding the guardianship of secularism. Naturally, from the very beginning, the AK Party's Islamist origins obliged people to question whether the secular military and the Islamist AK Party could work in harmony or not. The civil–military events before the AK Party era, the coup d'états and the military's traditional rhetoric as the guardians of secularism (or Kemalism) give us an idea about post-2002 events and the tolerance of the infiltration of congregations, such as the FETÖ. These implementations also oblige us to question the AK Party's intentions to depoliticise the army (objective control) or eliminate officers who were against its political view by replacing left-secular-oriented military ideology with the ideology of Islamist groups (subjective control). In the following sections, we discuss this problem by analysing the key events in civil–military relations during the AK Party's rule.

### **1.1 AK Party's Earlier Periods and the EU Reforms (2002–2007)**

After it came to rule, the AK Party drew a picture that was entirely different from its successor, the RP; its members presented themselves as liberal, democratic, committed to secularism principles and supporting Atatürk's revolutions. It declared its first foreign policy target to be European Union membership (Kurt & Toktaş, 2010, p. 393). The changing discourse of the party enabled it to get support from almost every section of society, including secular businessmen and the enlightened liberal class (Somer, 2007, p. 1272). However, the more secular groups, especially the Kemalists and a dominant element of the military general staff, remained suspicious. Some Kemalists accused the AK Party of making *Takiyye* (acting tactfully) to hide its real Islamist intentions (Faltas, 2012, p. 136). The Kemalists claimed that the AK Party put forward the EU card to reduce the military's ongoing role as the guardian of secularism (Misrahi, 2004, p. 24; Mütercimler, 2014, p. 522). Accordingly, one of the fundamental obstacles against Turkey's European Union (EU) membership was the military's autonomy and supervision over politics. EU authorities strictly objected to this. On the other hand, the Turkish military had always stated that EU membership should be one of the main goals of Turkey because it would be the ultimate point of Atatürk's Westernisation goal (Bardakçı, 2008, p. 23).

Additionally, the military authorities believed that EU membership would help liberal ideals, such as equality, freedom of speech and other major aspects of human rights among citizens, to prevail. Eventually, that would lead Turkey to complete its democratisation process. In a completely democratised Turkey, there would not be any need for the military to intervene in politics to protect the secular democratic regime. In this way, the military would adopt a more professional role by staying out of politics (Heper, 2005b, p. 215–31).

In the following process, the AK Party government issued a number of reform packages for achieving EU membership (Gürsoy, 2011, p. 296). These earlier packages involved major changes regarding civil–military relations, such as reducing the military’s influence in the National Security Council and increased civilian monitoring over the military’s defence expenditures, reforms in the military courts (Heper, 2005a, p. 37–38). During Hilmi Özkök’s term in office as the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (2002–2006) in particular, the military appeared to have a more harmonious relationship with the government (Kurt & Toktaş, 2010, p. 393–394). Indeed, the military authorities did not want to be an obstacle against the EU membership in the eyes of people, because that kind of situation would leave the military in a position that conflicted with its own westernist ideals (Misrahi, 2004, p. 24). The military rhetoric against a possible Islamic resurgence further increased, especially during Yaşar Büyükanıt’s (Özkök’s successor) term of office as the chief of the Turkish general staff (2006–2008) (Akyürek et al., 2014, p. 159–161). It is fair to say that earlier AK Party reforms were more consistent with Huntington’s objective theory. As discussed in detail in further sections, an objective model requires an autonomous area for the military by which civilian and military domains are clearly separated and do not interfere in each other’s domains. In this way, the military increases its professionalism both normatively (obedient to civilians, remaining politically passive, neutral and impartial) and technically (combat expertise).<sup>5</sup>

### **1.2 E-Memorandum (2007)**

As mentioned previously, Büyükanıt was more insistent in the protection of secularism from the beginning of his term in 2006. Büyükanıt’s strengthened emphasis on secularism prevailed after the issuing of the 2007 e-memorandum. In the evening of the first round of the 2007 presidential elections, the military released a formal statement on its website that declared the military’s objection to the AK Party’s candidate, Abdullah Gül, by referring to his Islamist past. It stated that the military would fulfil its task of protecting the major principles of the constitution referred in the Article 35 of its Internal Service Act (BBC News, 2007). This event can be seen a development in favour of civilian rule against the military. In the past, the

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<sup>5</sup> See section 3, ‘Analysis: Subjective Model and the AK Party’s Policies’.



civilian governments had always stepped back after these types of military statements. But the AK Party government did not do that. The government spokesperson, Cemil Çiçek, stated that ‘the primary duty regarding protection of the state’s basic principles belonged to the government... Turkey’s every problem would be solved within rule of law and democracy... Any idea or policy other than that would never be accepted’ (Çelik, 2020). Eventually, Abdullah Gül was chosen as the next president and the military did not show any resistance. In the 2007 general elections, the AK Party increased its votes to 46.5 percent (Haber Türk, 2007). Perhaps the e-memorandum caused an increase in the AK Party votes. Both the AKP supporters and the Kemalists showed their resistance to the military interventions during that era (Aydınlı, 2009, p. 595).

The e-memorandum can be seen as a turning point regarding the involvement of FETÖ members in the military. Until then, the military still appeared staunchly committed to secularism and Kemalist principles. Although the military had avoided direct interference in governmental affairs, it occasionally objected to potential anti-secular practices, such as reacting to the wearing of headscarves or turbans and the opening of Imam-Hatip (religious) schools (see Hürriyet, 2004; Milliyet, 2003). As previously mentioned, Büyükanıt’s emphasis on secularism was further strengthened. The context of the e-memorandum was explicitly against political Islam and claimed the protection of the secularism principle. Although different scenarios were later drawn, especially after the Dolmabahçe meetings on 5 May 2007, the external appearance of the event shows that Islamist congregations, such as the FETÖ, were not strong at that level or, at least, were hiding (CNN Türk, 2019). Furthermore, both the government’s and the people’s reactions to the e-memorandum were harsher than expected, especially when compared to previous civil–military tensions. Even people who were known as leftist or from the opposition parties reacted to the e-memorandum (Aydınlı, 2009, p. 595). In previous interventions, the military had benefitted from huge public support, but this time, they could not garner the same support, and Abdullah Gül was chosen as the next President (Yeni Şafak, 2007). Additionally, on 21 October 2007, the referendum for constitutional change was accepted by the people with a majority of 68 per cent (Dirlik, 2016). On 22 July 2007, the AK Party won the general election with a majority of 46 per cent (Birand, 2007). All of these developments gave the impression that the people supported civilian authority against military intervention. However, there are claims that the e-memorandum increased the AK Party’s votes (Vatan, 2007; Birand, 2007). Naturally, these developments were discouraging for the secular–nationalist wing of the military and broke their resistance to the forthcoming Ergenekon accusations, which was the key event that enabled the FETÖ infiltration into the military high command, as will be argued in the following section. Therefore, we may suggest that the results of the e-memorandum strengthened Islamist groups (primarily FETÖ) within the military (for the

critical role that the e-memorandum played in this regard, see Başbuğ, 2016, p. 37). Comments about the 22 July 2007 elections and the analysis of the relationship between the e-memorandum and the AK Party's rising votes from the famous journalist Mehmet Ali Birand are remarkable at this point: 'The results of the 2007 elections started a very fresh term in Turkey. The period of absolute secular approach and secular discourse, which have been familiar for 80 years, was closed' (Birand, 2007).

### 1.3 Ergenekon Trials (2008–2011)

The military's weakening influence in politics increased significantly after the beginning of the Ergenekon trials. Ergenekon became the name of a so-called operation that allegedly aimed to overthrow the AK Party government. The operation plan was allegedly prepared by some generals and intellectuals who were opposed to the AK Party government (Aydınlı, 2009, p. 592). Ergenekon (2008) was followed by other so-called operation plans, such as Kafes (2009) and Balyoz (2010). During these trials, many officers and generals in key positions, including the Chief of the Turkish General Staff, İlker Başbuğ (2008–2010), and the Head Commanders of Land, Navy and Air were charged and arrested (Hürriyet, 2012). One main characteristic of the accused during the Ergenekon trials was that most of them were known for their opposition to the AK Party government (Faltas, 2012, p. 135). As a result of the trials, the Chief of the General Staff, Işık Koşaner (İlker Başbuğ's successor), handed in his resignation, along with the commanders of Navy, Air and Land by stating that they felt guilty because they could not defend the military's rights during these prosecutions (BBC News, 2011). Basically, the following stage causes one to assume that the whole Ergenekon process could indeed be a 'plot' (kumpas) designed by the Gülen organisation to install its members in vacated positions to capture the military (Mütercimler, 2014, p. 230; Özçelik, 2019, p. 10; Petek, 2017, p. 41, 71; Sputnik, 2019; Orakoğlu, 2020; Sözcü, 2016; Sirmen, 2020, p. 187–189; Bingöl and Varlık, 2017, p. 25).<sup>6</sup> All of those who were charged during Ergenekon were acquitted of all crimes. (T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi, 2019).<sup>7</sup> Some key members of the 15 July, 2016, coup attempt, indeed, had obtained vacated positions from the arrested military personnel in the post-Ergenekon process (Hürriyet, 2016; Şık, 2016; Başbuğ, 2016, p. 92–93; Öztürk, 2016, p. 219).<sup>8</sup> As discussed in the following sections, the Ergenekon process and the suggestions that it was a plot by the Gülenists to

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<sup>6</sup> There are a plethora of resources claiming that Ergenekon was a plot by the FETÖ to infiltrate the army by removing Kemalist-secular officers. However, the majority of these claims still come from origins closer to the left-secular wing, such as the newspaper, Sözcü. Even several authors and media closer to the AK Party currently accept that Ergenekon was a plot (for instance, see Orakoğlu, 2020 in the Yeni Şafak newspaper, which is known to be close to the AK Party).

<sup>7</sup> Excluding the four suspects who were found guilty of attacking the Council of State.

<sup>8</sup> İlker Başbuğ was the Chief of General Staff from 2008–2010 who became an Ergenekon suspect and was later proven innocent. Bekir Öztürk is a former Ergenekon suspect who was proven innocent. Hürriyet's news provides a list of the promoted personnel in Supreme Military Council (YAS) meetings from 2011 to 2015 who were later involved in the coup attempt. (See Hürriyet, 2016).

infiltrate the military’s higher command provides an important example of a subjective model because it aims to increase civilian control by dividing and weakening it. In other words, the subjective model achieves civilian control over the military by civilianising the military and making it ‘the mirror of the state’ (Huntington, 1983, p. 59). Several methods can be used for this purpose, including secret police, border guards, paramilitary forces, militias and presidential guards as can be seen in the Ergenekon process and the following FETÖ penetration into the high command (see Feaver, 1999, p. 225)<sup>9</sup>. As argued below, during the Ergenekon trials, the assumed AK Party–Gülen alliance remained. Hence, the AK Party perhaps remained passive because it saw this case as an opportunity to take the military on-side.<sup>10</sup>

#### **1.4 The So-Called ‘Depoliticisation Process’ (2011–2016)**

The resignations of Işık Koşaner and the other commanders pushed the military through an ostensible depoliticisation that continued until the 15 July, 2016, attempted coup. During Necdet Özel’s term of office as the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (2011–2015), the military appeared to be in harmony with the government by abstaining from any type of political action. The military seemed obedient to the government in every policy. Özel was awarded a ‘medal of honour’. While giving the medal, President Erdoğan thanked Özel for his co-operation with the government in various fields. Erdoğan also praised Özel’s sensitivity regarding the principles of the constitution and rule of law (Hürriyet, 2015).

Indeed, some might associate the Turkish military’s depoliticisation from 2011 to 2016 with Samuel Huntington’s definition of ‘professionalism’ and the ‘Objective Control Model’ (Ayvaz, 2015; Heper, 2011, p. 242). As aforementioned briefly, this theory is based on the arguments in Huntington’s work, *The Soldier and The State*, which was published in 1957 and has been employed as the main approach for describing democratic/liberal civil–military relations among scholars. According to this theory, professionalism refers to a case in which there is a certain line between military and civilian obligations and both sides do not interfere in each other’s spheres. In other words, the military stays out of politics, remains politically impartial and does not interfere in politicians’ domains. This general isolation allows the military to focus on its professional duties, such as combat, training units and preparing for warfare; it can follow political events and submit opinions – particularly in security matters – when this is demanded of it, but the last word is left to civilians. (Huntington, 1957, p. 83). Nevertheless, the attempted coup on the 15 July, 2016, indicated that this type of professionalism was not absorbed by all units of the military. Also, much like in Özel’s term of office, there were serious

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<sup>9</sup> See the discussion about the paramilitary forces in footnote 11.

<sup>10</sup> See section 2.1, ‘The AK Party and the Gülen Organisation’, and section 3, ‘Analysis: Subjective Model and the AK Party’s Policies’.

claims that the Gülen organisation was gaining power within the military and it could attempt to a coup d'état in the near future (Erkin, 28 May, 2020, p. 109–110; Önsel, 2020, p. 118). On the one hand, if we look at the case from this perspective, the process becomes another example of subjective control in which a civilian-based terrorism-oriented paramilitary organisation<sup>11</sup> aimed to make the military its own tool. On the other hand, the Gülen–AK Party conflict had already started, so the AK Party's previous putative efforts to bring the military onside partly failed and a rival group in the military was developed.

## **2. WHO IS FETULLAH GÜLEN AND WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GÜLENIST CONGREGATION?**

The founder of the Gülen organisation, Fetullah Gülen, was born in Erzurum in 1941. When he was 14, he became a religious preacher. Later, Gülen was appointed to Edirne as an Imam (religious leader) and continued his preaching (Öztürk, 2016, p. 29). One of his earliest activities was to establish the Association for the Struggle Against Communism (Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği). By the end of the 1960s, the people who came together to listen to him preaching began to organise the first brotherhood (cemaat or hizmet) establishments. The Fetullah Gülen Brotherhood (Tarikat or Cemaat) Movement rapidly gained disciples and grew quickly. The organisation established strong connections with every institution of the state, including the police, military, the assembly, media, sport and business. The organisation applied every method to gain disciples, including oppression, extortion and plotting. (Şahin et al., 2018, p. 18).

Fetullah Gülen's private schools raised a so-called new, elite younger generation who were intellectual and Islam-oriented (altın nesil or golden generation). It is reported that the first penetration of the Gülenists to the military came in 1977 (Gümüş, 2021, p. 131). During the 1980s, the penetration gained momentum. Occasionally, some measures were taken to eliminate Gülenist members from the military. Nevertheless, it could not stop the organisation's growth (Demirağ, 2015, p. 45). There were several methods used by the organisation to penetrate the military. The most frequent method was stealing exam papers and giving them to its members several days before the exams (Demirağ, 2015, p. 56–58). Sometimes, some of its members refused to take the exam papers, arguing that it was sinful behaviour. The leaders of the organisation told them that this was not a sin because 'there were many traitors within the military who attempt to enter in the military such as Christians, Jews and Masons' (Öztürk, 2016, p. 123–124). Another method used by the organisation was to mob, bully and harass the non-Gülenist members in the military schools and force them to quit

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<sup>11</sup> Normally, paramilitary refers to a group organised like an army, but it is neither official nor legal (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/s%C3%B6zl%C3%BCk/ingilizce/paramilitary>). In this case, although the FETÖ penetrated the military, their methods were similar to that of a paramilitary organisation, which is not suited to an obey and command structure and applies terrorist methods, such as bombing civilians, oppression, extortion and plotting. It is also officially illegal.

(Gümüş, 2021, p. 145; Özçelik, 2019, p. 92–93). The organisation particularly deceived lonely or poor officer candidates by promising them housing and the opportunity to gain new friends. The houses were known as ‘light houses’ (Işık Evleri). In these houses, the leaders of the organisation brainwashed fresh officer candidates to convince them to join the organisation. (Demirağ, 2015, p. 61)

The leaders brainwashed the officers by forcing them to read Fetullah Gülen’s books and to listen his teachings. The newcomers were also warned that they should be careful when performing their rituals or prayers and should hide their real identities (Gümüş, 2021, p. 33). They were even told that they should drink alcohol if necessary (Başbuğ, 2016, p. 33). One effective method by the organisation was to give ‘fake health reports’ to eliminate the non-Gülenist officers. The fake health reports were prepared by the Gülenist members in the GATA (Gülhane Military Medical Academy) (Gümüş, 2021, p. 151; Özçelik, 2019, p. 126; Petek, 2017, p. 124). The Gülenist disciples are convinced that Atatürk was the ‘deccal’, (the greatest enemy of Islam, who, according to the Islamic resources, will come before the judgement day) (Çağlar et al., 2017, p. 108; Gümüş, 2021, p. 57). Indeed, Fetullah Gülen’s several speeches that were leaked to the media gave clues about his real intentions. In a video recorded in 1995, Gülen told his disciples: ‘Until the right time comes, you will coil in the state’s capillary without making them feel’ (Petek, 2017, p. 61).

## **2.1 The AK Party and the Gülen Organisation**

It is fair to say that in the beginning, the AK Party remained tolerant toward the Gülen organisation (see Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 62; Başbuğ, 2016, p. 37). This tolerance put the Gülenists in a better position to penetrate the military (Özdağ, 2019, p. 26; Demirağ, 2015, p. 107). Indeed, the Gülen organisation was allegedly giving support to the AK Party, perhaps, due to the latter’s Islamic background. The party benefitted from the Gülenists’ support, especially during elections (Bozdağ, 2016, p. 118–119; Demirağ, 2015, p. 123; Petek, 2017, p. 34). Additionally, Gülenist media provided steady support for the AK Party until the conflict (Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 196). Certainly, the Ergenekon trials accelerated the Gülenists’ penetration of the military. Gülenist officers were rapidly promoted to higher ranks and filled the empty positions that had been left by the arrested personnel (Bingöl and Varlık, 2017, p. 25; Çağlar et al., 2017, p. 182; Özçelik, 2019, p. 129; Petek, 2017, p. 71).

Indeed, the AK Party was generally supportive of the Ergenekon trials. Prime minister Erdoğan once associated the Ergenekon trials with the ‘Clean Hands Operation’ in Italy, stating, ‘there will be no more gangs and mafias in Turkey, we are decisive on that matter’ (CNN Türk, 2018). Erdoğan also stated that he was the ‘prosecutor’ involved in the Ergenekon trials (Vatan, 2008). Accordingly, the deputy prime minister of the AK Party, Bülent Arınç, stated, ‘[the] whole [of] Turkey mainly owe[s] to them

[the prosecutors of Ergenekon] in the name of democracy’ and that ‘Turkey is cleansing her guts’ (Sputnik Türkiye, 2017). Indeed, the Taraf newspaper – which was later shut down due to its relationship with the Gülen organisation – defined the Ergenekon plan as an attempt to ‘finish the AK Party and the Gülen congregation’ (Başbuğ, 2016, p. 163–164). Eventually, all those arrested during the Ergenekon trials were acquitted from all charges (Hürriyet, 2019). As aforementioned, it might be assumed that the whole process could be a plot designed by the Gülenists to replace their own sympathisers with Kemalist officers (Mütercimler, 2014, p. 230; Özçelik, 2019, p. 10; Petek, 2017, p. 41, 71; Sputnik, 2019; Orakoğlu, 2020; Sözcü, 2016; Sirmen, 2020, p. 187–189; Bingöl and Varlı, 2017, p. 25). Also, the chief prosecutor involved in the Ergenekon trials, Zekeriya Öz, was later found guilty of ‘attempting to establish [a criminal] organisation and to destroy the Republic of Turkey by applying vandalism’. After being found guilty, Öz escaped from Turkey (Anadolu Ajansı, 2015).

## **2.2 AK Party – Gülen Conflict**

The first conflicts between the AK Party and the Gülenists began after the 2010 referendum. The conflict became apparent following a number of events, such as Erdoğan’s declarations against Gülenist schools (dershaneler), the Gülen–Erdoğan collision in the Blue Marmara (Mavi Marmara) incident of 2010, the MİT (Turkish Intelligent Service) trucks crisis of 2012 and the 17–25 December investigations of 2013 (Cumhuriyet, 2018). Erdoğan referred to the Gülenists as having a ‘parallel structure/parallel state structure – PYD’ and as being a ‘state within the state’ (BBC News, 2016; Daily Sabah, 2016). Although certain dates are contested, particularly since 2013, the Gülen organisation was more often referred to as ‘the Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organisation’ (FETÖ) (Evrensel, 2016). In any case, the organisation has currently been declared a ‘terrorist’ organisation (see Habertürk, 2017). Erdoğan once admitted having previously supported the Gülenists, asking, ‘is there anything that you demanded from us and you could not have?’ (Cumhuriyet, 2019). The former AK Party’s deputy prime minister, Cemil Çiçek (2007–2011), referred to the Gülenists’ penetration when he stated that ‘since the 1970s, everyone has [had] responsibility if things [got] to [a certain] point; perhaps my mistake [makes up] 90 percent [of the problem], others’ [five] percent [or] one percent, but even [one] percent is enough [to poison] [the state]’ (Hürriyet, 2016). Even during the so-called depoliticisation in Necdet Özel’s term of office (2011–2015), there were strong indicators of the Gülenists’ penetration of the military. For instance, one Ergenekon (Balyoz) victim, retired officer Mustafa Önsel, warned the authorities against a possible Gülenist coup d’état just four months before it occurred (Önsel, 2016; Önsel, 2020, p. 118). Indeed, Özel once angrily denied Gülenist penetration, stating, ‘there [are] not any Gülenist[s] in the headquarters’ (Erkin, 2020, p. 109).

Yet, following his resignation, Özel admitted negligence with regard to taking necessary measures against the Gülenists (Sözcü, 2016).

### **2.3 15 July 2016: Attempted Coup D'état**

In any case, the Gülenists attempted a coup d'état on the 15 July 2016, but they encountered strong – and perhaps unexpected – resistance from the government, opposition parties, citizens and the media. Indeed, the juntaists captured the Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), the state's main news institution, by presenting themselves as the 'Peace at Home Council' (Yurtta Sulh Konseyi). They forced a TRT newsreader to read a coup declaration, which stated that the military had taken control. Yet, strong resistance crushed the juntaists' morale and caused them to fail. Indeed, an important portion of the military did not obey the Gülenist junta and resisted (Anadolu Ajansı, 2017). Some of these resisters were arrested during the Ergenekon trials (Yanardağ, 2019, p. 52). It has also been suggested that many of the resisters came from the Kemalist wing of the military or were republicans (Yanardağ, 2019, p. 53).

During the challenge, the Gülenists attacked civilians at the National Assembly (Cumhuriyet, 2017; Hürriyet, 2018). Among the juntaists were officers and generals who were rapidly promoted during the Ergenekon process and took the places of those who had been arrested (Başaran, 2016). For instance, one of the leading figures in the coup d'état attempt, Akın Öztürk, had quickly been promoted after the Balyoz Trials, and he became Head Commander of the Air Forces following the arrests of many commanders. Öztürk retained this role for two years until 2015, when he was tried and arrested. (Hürriyet, 2016). There are many other similar examples of individuals who were promoted during the post-Ergenekon process but were later involved in the 15 July 2016 attempted coup (Hürriyet, 2016; Şık, 2016; Başbuğ, 2016, p. 92-93; Öztürk, 2016, p. 219).

It is fair to say that the 15 July 2016 attempted coup d'état indicated that the Ergenekon practice had negative impacts on the military and the nation. Indeed, President Erdoğan once admitted that a mistake had been made in tolerating this organisation, stating: 'I do not refuse that the FETÖ (Fetullah Terrorist Organisation) [had] grown during our rule, they were a big betrayal network, we were deceived' (BBC News Türkçe, 2018). In any case, both the AK Party and opponent parties harshly condemned the Gülenists' attempt at a coup d'état. In the aftermath of the attempt, President Erdoğan announced a State of Emergency Rule (OHAL) to eliminate Gülenist members from every section of the state (Hürriyet, 2016). Also, further decisions were made to eliminate Gülenists from the military. The Chief of the Turkish General Staff and the Commanders of Land, Air and Naval Forces were subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence (Haber Türk, 2018). All of the military colleges and academies were subordinated to the newly established National Defence University, while the rector of this university was subordinated to the president (Anadolu Ajansı, 2016). The

Kuleli Military High School was closed (Sputnik Türkiye, 2017). Military hospitals were subordinated to the Ministry of Health (Cumhuriyet, 2016). The Military Supreme Administrative Court and the Military Court of Appeals (AYİM) were both dissolved. The structure of the Supreme Military Council (YAŞ) was redesigned in the civilians' favour (Bayramoğlu, 2020). The Gendarmerie Command and the Coast Guard Command were subordinated to the Ministry of Home Affairs (Yeni Şafak, 2016).

Under normal conditions, these regulations by the government would be seen as necessary for democratisation. Indeed, civilianisation in civil–military relations has always been required in Turkey due to the ongoing military tutelage. This requirement provided a significant obstacle to democratisation. In the current framework, the military is completely subordinated to the civilians. The current shape of civil–military relations perhaps could be assumed to be closer to those of advanced, liberal democracies. Yet, despite these regulations, there is always the risk that juntaist establishments, such as the Gülen organisation, may re-emerge. Since this type of organisation generally emerges to oppose an obey and command structure, formal measures may not be adequate enough to prevent this. Furthermore, there are suggestions that the OHAL implementations are indeed another effort at subjective control because there was too much civilian interference into the military's educational, health and justice systems (see Özdağ, 2019, p. 34–44; Bingöl and Varlık, 2017, p. 61–82; Başbuğ, 2016, p. 63–88). The issue is also discussed in the following sections.

In the next section, we analyse the attempted coup d'état on 15 July 2016. However, before the analysis, we briefly make the following suggestions: the AK Party made essential reforms to subordinate the military in their earlier years. Their efforts ostensibly portrayed a democratic image that is consistent with Huntington's objective control model. Yet, the memorandum and the military's weakening in the eyes of people, the FETÖ's penetration during the Ergenekon trials, the AK Party's tolerance, the beginning of AK Party–Gülen conflict and the AK Party's weakening supervision over the military cause one to question whether the AK Party aimed to replace left-secular military ideology with Islamist ideology or not? In other words, did the AK Party try to depoliticise the army or did it try to eliminate the officers who were against its political views? These questions naturally oblige us to consider the possibility that the AK Party failed to achieve this purpose, at least partly, after starting to conflict with the FETÖ. The ultimate result of this failure was FETÖ's coup attempt against the government. Yet, as discussed in the following sections, the AK Party still could be trying to make the military its 'mirror' by supporting the infiltration of other Islamist groups as illustrated by the subjective model.



### **3. ANALYSIS: SUBJECTIVE MODEL AND THE AK PARTY’S POLICIES**

In previous sections, we briefly defined the subjective model by associating it with several cases that occurred during the AK Party’s era. In this section, we aim to give a more detailed definition of the model by comparing it to its opposite theory: the objective model. We will then broadly analyse civil–military relations by observing past events and making assumptions about possible outcomes in the future. According to Huntington, there are two methods of implementing civilian control over the military: *subjective* and *objective* models. The subjective model is based on maximising civilian power. Subjective control enables civilian supremacy by minimising military power and maximising civilian power. Civilian groups can include governmental institutions, social classes and constitutional forms. There are several difficulties in this model because the conflicting interests of civilian groups can prevent them from combining their powers against the military; for example, the AK Party–Gülen discord provided this type of conflicting interest. According to Huntington, the solution to the problem is to enhance the power of one civilian group at the expense of other civilian groups (Huntington, 1957, p. 80–81).

Objective control is based on maximising military professionalism by adopting professional behaviour and attitudes and accepting soldiery as a profession. In its autonomous area, the military remains politically passive, neutral and impartial (depoliticisation). Certainly, civilians remain masters by giving orders to the military who obey these orders without objection or hesitation, but they can also give advice when required, especially on matters regarding security. Huntington defines this model as the opposite of the subjective model. He argues that the subjective model achieves civilian control over the military by civilianising the military and making it ‘the mirror of the state’, while the objective model achieves it by militarising the military and making it a ‘tool of the state’ (Huntington, 1957, p. 83). From this framework, we may argue that Huntington’s objective control model offers a civil–military separation in which both civilians and the military have its own autonomous areas. Therefore, while supervising the military, civilians should be careful to avoid interfering in the military’s autonomous zone. This is because if civilians were to interfere in the military’s internal matters too much, it would cause the military to be politicised and to be divided into different political sects. This would also cause civilians to indoctrinate their ideology into the military so that it becomes a party army (Cottey et al., 2002, p. 33; Perlmutter, 1977, p. 13). Huntington argues that the German military gradually became a party army through methods of ‘reducing, dividing, limiting’ the authority of military institutions. The level of German General Staff, which normally should be the centre of professionalism, was steadily lowered, and eventually, the military was divided into three different groups. (For details see Huntington, 1957, p. 121). Hitler assumed the position of Supreme Commander and appointed

Nazi sympathisers to key positions in the military (Huntington, 1957, p. 113–119). Hitler's other tactics, Huntington argues, were methods of slander and plotting, such as falsely accusing Commander-in-Chief Werner von Fritsch of being a homosexual and removing him from position, an event that contributed to Hitler's increasing control over the military (Huntington, 1957, p. 120). Werner von Blomberg, another professional general who resisted Hitler's policies, was removed from his position with similar methods, assuming his wife was a 'prostitute' (Huntington, 1957, p. 120). As mentioned before, using secret police, border guards, paramilitary forces, militias and presidential guards can be seen as methods of subjective control (see Feaver, 1999, p. 225). Although not exactly the same, similar methods, such as oppression, extortion and plotting were applied by the FETÖ as mentioned previously (Şahin et al., 2018, p. 18). According to Huntington, the subjective model is more widespread than the objective model as, most often, civilians attempt to indoctrinate their ideals into the military to increase their power. This type of model is more common in new democracies. At this point, we may suggest that subjective control could involve three risks. First, it damages democracy. Second, it weakens the military's combat prowess, for the appointments of officers and generals are made according to ideological concerns and not according to competence. Third, the subjective model politicises the military by dividing it into different political sects. Therefore, in this type of control, juntaist establishments can emerge, which is what occurred in the Gülenists' case.

Accordingly, there are suggestions that the AK Party's rule should be defined as subjective control rather than objective control. The earliest suggestion of this was implied by Ergenekon victim and former chief of the Turkish general staff, İlker Başbuğ. Başbuğ once stated, 'In civil[–]military relations, there is objective control and the subjective control. In the subjective control, politicians aim to control everything and aim to maintain by dividing' (Başbuğ, 2016, p. 74; also see Özdağ's arguments in Özdağ, 2019, p. 34–37). Currently, there is a claim that the AK Party is aiming to create a 'party army' (for instance, see Özdağ, 2017). According to these suggestions, the above-mentioned state of emergency regulations were indeed made for this purpose (see Özdağ, 2019, p. 34–37). Additionally, the Supreme Military Council produced some unexpected decisions. Some officers who had connections with the Gülenists were promoted to higher ranks, while officers who had resisted the Gülenists were forced to retire. For example, two-star general Nerim Bitlisioğlu, who had submitted two reports to eliminate the Gülenists, was forced to retire (Erkin, 2019, p. 141–142). Similarly, Colonel Aziz Yılmaz and Colonel Güven Şağban, who fought with the juntaists on the 15 July, 2016, were later forced to retire (Erkin, 2020). Some others who, according to critics, were forced to retire in a similar way were two-star generals Şevki Gençtürk, Mehmet Okkan, Hakan Atınç and Sevinç Şaşmaz, four-star general Abdullah Recep and one-star generals Atilla Şirin, Celalettin Bacanlı, Ufuk Demirkılıç, Sırrı Yılmaz,

Erdal Şener, Süleyman Ertizman, Hançeri Sayat, Erkan Olgay, Erdoğan Baykal and Mustafa Barut (Önsel, 2020, p. 217-227).

Furthermore, some critics accuse the government of creating a ‘controlled coup’ (kontrollü darbe), which means that the government learned of the coup before it occurred and allowed it to happen to increase the government’s popularity (Önsel, 2020, p. 177–178; Öztürk, 2016, p. 203–204; Yanardağ, 2019, p. 36–39, 43, 47, 80) However, other critics have put forward the case of a ‘counter coup’ (karşı darbe), which means that the government provided an advantage in the situation by declaring a state of emergency in order to eliminate its opponents (Yanardağ, 2019, p. 7, 33, 80, 89). This case is also described as ‘the 20 July counter-coup’ (Yanardağ, 2019, p. 88). Nevertheless, many have objected to these speculations, including the opponents.

When we observe the whole process from the beginning of the AK Party’s rule, we should distinctly analyse different periods. In their earlier period, the AK Party’s reforms to subordinate the military were ostensibly consistent with objective control. But even during that period, left-wing Kemalists, military commanders and the judiciary remained strongly susceptible to the AK Party’s liberal and secular discourse by accusing them of aforementioned *Takiyye* (i.e. acting tactfully). As mentioned previously, the word *Takiyye* became very famous during this time to define the AK Party’s assumed ‘insincerity’; see Özbudun & Hale, 2010, p. 61). Hence, we may ask the question: did the AK Party really intend to create military depoliticisation or did it aim to eliminate the officers who were against its political ideology by replacing the left-secular-oriented officers with Islamist groups? If the second possibility is true, the aforementioned Gülen–AK Party alliance in the earlier periods of AK Party rule can be considered an effort to achieve this purpose. After the failure of the e-memorandum in 2007 and the people’s support for a civilian government, the military’s confidence regarding its influence in society was weakened. Perhaps because of this, the military could not show a serious reaction to the Ergenekon trials because many people already believed they were guilty. The Ergenekon process, following the e-memorandum, accelerated the FETÖ penetration into the military using methods very similar to the ones associated with the subjective model. Among the alleged methods used by the FETÖ, the most common were cheating in exams and interviews during officer recruitment, stealing exam questions and giving them to their members before the exam, preparing fake digital documents, fake signatures, recording secret videos inside the chief of the general staff’s office, preparing fake health reports to eliminate non-Gülenists and recruiting their own members by oppression, extortion, slander, plotting and mobbing the officers who were not members of the organisation (Şahin et al., 2018, p. 18; Bozdağ, 2016, p. 91, 123–124; Gümü, 2021, p. 145, 151; Özçelik, 2019, p. 92–93, 126–127; Petek, 2017, p. 124; Demirağ, 2015, p. 56–58). These methods have already been explained in previous sections, but there are many more examples in the

aforementioned resources. Here, we recalled these examples to show the similarity between the subjective model and the FETÖ penetration as observed in the aforementioned Nazi case.

The AK Party's tolerance to the Ergenekon investigations can also be defined with the subjective model. The AK Party could have been expected to increase its influence in the military through the penetration of these Islamist groups, in this case by the Gülenists. Yet, as argued by Huntington, in the subjective model, civilian groups tend to battle with each other because of their conflicting interests (Huntington, 1957, p. 80–81). Naturally, the Gülen–AK Party conflict prevented the AK Party from its putative intention to control the army (at least partly). Although both the Gülen and AK Party came from Islamist rhetoric, we may suggest that most disciples of the FETÖ preferred to obey Fethullah Gülen during this conflict because the AK Party's weakened control over the military became apparent in the 15 July attempted coup. Therefore, explaining the military's ostensible depoliticisation from 2011–2016 with the objective model would be a wrong assumption. Indeed, these years were perhaps the most active period of subjective control because FETÖ members insidiously captured the higher positions (see *Hürriyet*, 2016; Şık, 2016; Başbuğ, 2016, p. 92–93; Öztürk, 2016, p. 219).<sup>12</sup> However, the AK Party's post-15 July practices could be interpreted as another attempt at subjective control (see Özdağ's analysis of the OHAL decisions in Özdağ, 2019, p. 34–41). The amendments during the OHAL could pose the risk of interfering in the military's area of expertise, which, according to Huntington, should also be autonomous for a democratic civil–military relationship (Özdağ, 2019, p. 34–41). This is also necessary for effective combat power and professionalism. For instance, Furlan makes a categorisation by dividing work tasks between military and civilian authorities under the titles of: 'mission and tasks', 'strategic guidance', 'personnel management', 'equipping', 'financing', 'training and education', 'readiness' and 'operations' (see Furlan, 2012, p. 435–445). Also, Feaver uses the explanation "proper division of labour between 'military matters' and 'civilian matters...'" (Feaver, 1999, p. 219). Therefore, civilians should be careful when interfering in these areas to preserve the military's professional structure.

When we return to the question of whether the AK Party tries to eliminate officers who are against its political ideology, we should also examine recent developments to give a better answer. There are strong suggestions that other religious congregations are replacing the FETÖ and spreading their members throughout the military. Even former FETÖ members hide by joining other Islamist groups to remain in the military. The same suggestions also criticise the AK Party because of its tolerance to these organisations. If these suggestions are true, this is another bid for subjective control with the AK Party promoting or condoning the infiltration of these groups to subordinate the military to its own will. As discussed below, most

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<sup>12</sup> See footnote 8.

of these groups currently support the AK Party, but in the future, they could also be involved in attempts, such as the 15 July attempted coup. Therefore, before the conclusion section, it would be beneficial to analyse the putative emergence of these groups as well as the reaction to these events by retired Kemalist officers.

#### **4. CLAIMS OF OTHER RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS**

Indeed, there are suggestions that the Gülenists maintain their existence by penetrating other groups or congregations (Önsel, 2020, p. 185). Normally, entry into military academies and colleges for non-commissioned officers required that applicants were ‘not absorbing any excessive religious (irtica) and separatist view (irtica) or not being involved in these type of activities’. With new regulations, this condition was abolished (Independent Türkçe, 2021). Some critics argue that the abolishment of this regulation opened the path for religious groups to enter the military. Indeed, there are suggestions that the Gülenists are not the only religious community within the military (Özçelik, 2019, p. 81; Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 32). For instance, a lieutenant colonel, Deniz Ç., became a witness in the Burdur Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office on the 5 August, 2016. Deniz declared that he belonged to the ‘Meşveret’ congregation, another religious group within the military that is separate to the Gülenists but that also follows the teachings of Saidi Nursi. Deniz maintained that until 2012, there had been no conflict between the Meşverets and the Gülenists. Nevertheless, following the 17–25 December corruption allegations, the Meşverets sided with the AK Party and supported it in the local elections (Özçelik, 2019, p. 82).

Another assumed congregation is the ‘Menzilciler’, which comes from the Halidiyye branch of the Nakşibendiler congregation. This congregation is known for its supportive policies in relation to the AK Party (Balancar, 2019, p. 29). Some now argue that the Menzilciler congregation is the most powerful organisation (congregation) in the state since it filled the positions left empty by the Gülenists (Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 19, 23). There are even suggestions that former Gülenists now conceal themselves by joining the Menzilciler group, preserving their positions in state departments. According to these assertions, the Menzilciler group began to penetrate the military (Çiçek, 2018). Ümit Özdağ claimed that once students entered the military academy, they argued with each other regarding whose congregation’s Imam would lead the Friday prayer (Özdağ, 2018). Another report suggested that a group of ten soldiers, one of whom was a colonel, entered a mosque. They wore green Islamic caps and were making ‘zikir’, a religious ritual of repeating sacred words – sometimes with shaking and shouting. It was reported that the group belonged to the Süleymancılar congregation, another Nakşi-orientated common religious community in Turkey (Cumhuriyet, 2021).

In January 2019, Bitlis City-Governor İsmail Ustaoglu, city-Gendarmerie Commander Colonel Erhan Demir and Chief of Police Yamın Açarlar together visited the Nurs Village of the Hizan county, which is Saidi Nursi's city of birth. Vali Ustaoglu, who was welcomed by the villagers, observed the Nurs Village of Hizan county wherein Saidi Nursi was born. Ustaoglu said that 'almost two years ago, [one thousand] people, from every corner of the state, were coming and attending Saidi Nursi's commemoration communities. We will make [the] effort to return back to those days. We believe that this place, again, will be a tourism [centre]' (Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 63). Indeed, there are assertions that a short while ago, Minister of Home Affairs Bülent Soylu visited the Saidi Nursi village (Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 63). After the Gülenists' coup d'état attempt, the government's efforts to legitimise the Nurculuk congregation meant that soldiers may attend these Islamic communion (sohbet) meetings in the Nurs Village. In the Nurs Village's social media account, it was emphasised that 'from this moment, Nurs Village sit[s] in the Medrese (religious-orientated schools) and [is] talking with our soldier brothers from the Turkish Armed Forces' (Pehlivan & Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 63). We do not know exactly which of these claims are exaggerated or which, to some extent, have some inconsistencies. Yet, if the government does not take decisive action against these attempts, most of which are directly inspired by the Nurculuk movement, just as the Gülenists were, it is likely to encounter new religious-based juntaist establishments within the military (see Öztürk, 2019, p. 232-233; Pehlivan and Terkoğlu, 2019, p. 61). At this point, the suggestions of aforementioned former Ergenekon (Balyoz) victim, retired Colonel Mustafa Önsel, are remarkable. He assumes that the AK Party government tries to eliminate the FETÖ members by taking other Islamist groups as its alternative. In other words, these Islamist groups (or congregations) are considered the 'antidote' to the FETÖ (Önsel, 2020, p. 184–185). Yet, Önsel claims that a considerable number of FETÖ members remain in the military (Önsel, 2019, p. 183). He also emphasises the claims that at least 10 per cent of eliminated military personnel were mistakenly accused and were not even members of FETÖ (Önsel, 2019, p. 183). If we consider these experts' views as true, we continue to see other examples of subjective control.

#### **4.1 The 104 Admiral Event**

Aside from these cases, we should emphasise that an important development in this regard was the '104 Admiral Event'. According to the declaration known as the 'Montreux Declaration' or the '4 April Declaration', 104 retired admirals issued a warning letter. That letter referred to an event in which a general from the Naval Forces, Mehmet Sarı, appeared with a turban and robe in a congregated house. The letter criticised that event by declaring that 'in recent days, some unacceptable views, news and discussions in the press and social media have been deeply painful for us as [those] who [have] dedicated their life to this profession'. The statement

also declared that ‘it is mandatory that the personnel of [the] Naval Forces Commandership should be trained according to Atatürk’s principles and revolutions’. (Cumhuriyet, 2021). Naturally, the AK Party and the government condemned this declaration. For example, the Labour Minister of Family, Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk, stated in her twitter account that the ‘period of intervening (ayar vermek) in national will has passed’, implying the involvement of former military coups and junta regimes. The Yenişafak newspaper, which is known for favouring the AK Party, created the headline, ‘a declaration which crossed the lines from 103 admirals’ (Yenişafak, 2021). The 104 Admiral Event can be seen as evidence that the claims about the penetration of other Islamist congregations reached a serious point. Although the declaration of Admirals can be contested regarding its suitability for democratic ethics, the warning tone in the statement should not be disregarded, especially after witnessing a coup attempt only five years ago by an alleged Islamist organisation.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, we began by analysing military politicisation with a brief summary of the pre-AK Party period, which can be extended to the latest centuries of the Ottoman Empire. Yet, because of the limited scope of this paper, we focused on key events, such as the military’s role in the 1908 Revolution and the suppression of the counter-revolutionary movement on 31 March as well as the divisions within the military as Mektepli/Alaylı and İttihatçı/İtilafçı. Then, the paper explained the military’s interventions in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997 according to the assumption of the guardianship of secularism. However, as was the case in the 1980 intervention, this guardianship duty sometimes portrayed an ostensible image. Especially after the Cold War with the rise of political Islam and Kurdish separatist movements, the secular–nationalist discourse of the military seemed to be strengthened. The 28 February 1997 post-modern coup, the military’s earlier objections against several AK Party policies and the 2007 e-memorandum evidence this. At this point, the paper wanted to understand if the AK Party aimed to achieve military depoliticisation as assumed by the objective model or if it tried to eliminate officers against its party ideology by replacing left-orientated officers with Islamist officers. To approach the question from a theoretical perspective, the paper employed the subjective control model of Huntington. Subjective control aims to subordinate the military by civilising it, dividing it into different groups, eroding its professionalism and indoctrinating it with civilian political ideologies. The methods of subjective control can sometimes include plotting and slander using false evidence, as in the Nazi example, or using secret police, border guards, paramilitary forces, militias and presidential guards. The ultimate purpose, according to Huntington, is to make the military a mirror of the state. In this regard, FETÖ’s aforementioned methods for infiltrating the military, such as cheating in exams and interviews during officer recruitment, stealing exam

questions and giving them to their members before the exam, preparing fake digital documents, fake signatures, recording videos inside the chief of general staff's office, preparing fake health reports to eliminate non-Gülenists and recruiting their own members by oppression, extortion, plotting, slander and mobbing officers who are not members, provide examples of the subjective model.

The critical point here is the AK Party's attitude during the FETÖ infiltration. Until the e-memorandum in 2007, the military had a coercive and deterrent image as the guardian of secularism. However, after the memorandum, the civil authority refused to step back and showed decisive resistance. This attitude benefitted from huge public support by increasing the AK Party's votes to 46 per cent. The military's retreat after witnessing this huge reaction, perhaps, facilitated the Islamist groups' penetration into the army. In this regard, the Ergenekon trials began. Many officers in key positions were accused of preparing a plan to overthrow the AK Party's government. The investigation process and subsequent arrests vacated many positions in the military, and these positions were quickly filled by members of the FETÖ. During the process, the AK Party's government seemed supportive of the Ergenekon investigations and tolerant of the developments while these changes were happening in the military. The main purpose of the Ergenekon investigations only became apparent after the Gülen–AK Party conflict began. The suspects in Ergenekon were gradually acquitted of all charges and were proved innocent. From the end of the Ergenekon trials (2011) to the 15 July attempted coup (2016), the military appeared silent and obedient to the ruling party, which is normally consistent with the military depoliticisation depicted by Huntington's objective model. Nevertheless, the attempted coup d'état by FETÖ members on 15 July 2016 disproved this. The coup attempt proved that Ergenekon was a plot by FETÖ members to replace left-secular officers with their members. Some of the officers involved in the 15 July coup attempt had been rapidly promoted during (or post-) Ergenekon and had filled the positions vacated by Ergenekon suspects.

If we look at the case from a theoretical perspective, until the 15 July attempted coup, the process provides a clear example of the subjective model. The AK Party aimed to replace left-secular-orientated officers with Islamist officers and seemed to be tolerant to the FETÖ penetration. The main purpose here was to make the military a party army (or mirror of the party) by supporting Islamist groups as assumed by the subjective model. But later, the AK Party–Gülen conflict began, and the AK Party's control over the military was weakened. Indeed, this scenario is assumed by Huntington because, in subjective control, the conflicting interests of civilian groups sometimes prevent them from enabling full control over the military. The AK Party's situation after the Gülen–AK Party conflict can be explained with this situation. The strengthened FETÖ members attempted a coup to take control of the state but failed; this should normally have educated the



AK Party on the risks of politicising the army. Therefore, the AK Party's subsequent OHAL decisions should normally be considered an attempt at depoliticisation to prevent new occurrences of 15 July. Nevertheless, there might be some risk of subjective control in the OHAL decision because the structure of military schools, military hospitals and military courts changed and an increased civilian influence over these institutions was observed. A further risk was the strong suggestion of putative penetrations of other Islamist groups, such as the Menzilciler and Meşveret. The aforementioned 104 Admiral event can be considered a reaction to these developments. At this point, if the government remains tolerant of these groups, we might witness further problems; even perhaps attempted coups, such as on 15 July. Perhaps these groups currently seem supportive of the government, but the Gülenist organisation had also been supportive in the very beginning. Finally, as we initially assumed, this process can be evaluated in different ways. First, the AK Party aims to depoliticise the army as assumed by Huntington's objective model. Second, the AK Party aims to make the military its mirror by replacing left-orientated officers with Islamist groups. If the first possibility is true, it would be a positive development for democratisation. If the second possibility is true, it would bring further risks against the regime, as happened in the 15 July attempted coup, by reducing military professionalism and combat prowess assumed by the subjective model. The evidence presented in the paper suggests that the second scenario is more likely.

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