

BETWEEN PRAETORIANISM AND DEMOCRACY: THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Although the Turkish armed forces have long been an important political actor in Turkish politics, the 1990s, in particular have been the "golden age" of the military's involvement in domestic and foreign policy.

This article is an attempt to analyze the role of the military in the formation, and to some extent, in the execution of Turkish foreign policy starting from the early 1990s. It is argued here that the military's role in the making of foreign policy is directly linked with, and inseparable from, its place and role in domestic politics and society. Starting from the early 2000s, the military has shown signs of retreat from politics due to a combination of domestic and international developments.

KEYWORDS

Civil-military relations, praetorianism, Turkish military, military and foreign policy.

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There is little doubt that the military has been the most influential institution in Turkish political life since 1960. Its place, role and influence have steadily increased over the years. It is a constant, everlasting and almost omnipotent party behind the scenes that controls governments and wields veto power. Since 1960, it has been in politics either as supervisor or as decision-maker and intermittently as ruler, in the military interventions in 1960, 1971, 1980-83 and 1997.

The domestic role of the military in Turkish politics has been analyzed by many scholars of Turkish history and politics.¹ However, less attention has been paid to its role in the making of Turkish foreign policy,² although, as will be argued, it is too important a participant in crucial foreign policy issues to be neglected. The 1990s, in particular may be called the "golden age" of the military's involvement in domestic and foreign policy. More recently, starting from the early 2000s, the military has shown signs of retreat from politics due to a combination of domestic and international developments.

This article is an attempt to analyze the role of the military in the formation, and to some extent, in the execution of Turkish foreign policy starting from the early 1990s. It is argued here that the military's role in the making of foreign policy is directly linked with, and inseparable from, its place and role in domestic politics and society. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to give an outline of the civil-military relationship in Turkey.

¹Daniel Lerner and Richard Robinson, "Swords and Phoughshares: the Turkish Army as a Modernising Force," *World Politics*, 13 (1960); Frank Tashau and Metin Heper, "The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey," *Comparative Politics*, (October 1983); Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin, eds., *State, Democracy and the Military: Turkey in the 1980s*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1988; Ümit Cizre Sakallioglu, "The Anatomy of Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics*, (January 1997); William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, London, Routledge, 1994.

²Except Gencer Özcan's "Doksanlarda Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenlik ve Dış Politikasında Askeri Yapının Artan Etkisi," in Gencer Özcan and Şule Kut, eds., *En Uzun Onyıl*, Istanbul, Boyut, 1998, pp.67-100.

Expressions of Praetorianism

On a global scale, Turkey represents a paradox in civil-military relations the post-cold war era. Transition to democratic rule has largely been accomplished in the southern European countries in the 1970s and in Latin America in the 1980s. In a different context, the military institutions in the former East European countries have been largely placed under civilian control in the 1990s without any serious problems. In contrast, the role of the military in Turkish politics apparently increased in this period and its praetorian character became visible, especially during the Islamist Refahiyol coalition government of 1996-97.

The rise in the place and role of the Turkish armed forces in the post-Cold War period can be attributed to several factors. Structurally, the place of the military is closely related to the place of the state in a society where civil society is underdeveloped until the 1980s. State-society relations in Turkey are highly controversial, and without repeating the discussions which have lasted for years, it is suffice to note that this article is based on an approach that considers the state as having a relative autonomy vis-à-vis society.³ The military, as the most important component of the state in Turkey, enjoys double autonomy. First, by virtue of a strong state tradition in Turkey, the military maintains broad autonomy vis-à-vis society in all of its segments. Secondly, it has an autonomous status within the state against civilian politicians and against other bureaucratic agencies. This autonomy is different from what Samuel Huntington defined as "objective" control of the military.⁴ The Turkish military is not only institutionally autonomous and its promotion procedures are not subject to civilian control and scrutiny, it also has the power and capacity to shirk decisions taken by government.

³For instance, Ayse Bugra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey: A Comparative Study*, New York, State University Press, 1985; Metin Heper, *Strong State and Economic Interest Groups: The Post-1980 Experience in Turkey*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1991; Çağlar Keyder, *The State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development*, London, Verso, 1987.

⁴Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957.

Relying on its autonomous status, the Turkish military represents praetorian characteristics, a concept that is used to denote the self-assuming function of the military to control civilian authority. As Eric Nordlinger states, military officers became praetorian soldiers when they threaten or use force in order to enter or dominate the political arena.⁵ There are certain conditions for a political system to have praetorian characteristics. These include the ineffectiveness of the civilian government, the lack of legitimacy of the civilian regime, the decay of the political system, the tendency of the military to intervene in the political process especially when the regimes or governments are weak and unstable.⁶ It should be stated that the Turkish military has combined the two roles of a modernizing military and a praetorian army, and its praetorian character came to the fore when it feared that its modernizing function had faltered. In this sense, the Turkish armed forces have never been a "professional army" in Huntington's terms. It has always ideologically motivated, it has been an institution with a mission, in its own perception, a sacred mission to elevate the country to the level of civilized world. However, its modernizing mission has been overshadowed by its increasing praetorian character, especially in the 1990s.

In the military's own ideology, in order to accomplish this mission, the military has to control the civilian governments from behind the scenes and to permeate some of the critical bureaucratic institutions. Therefore, what Peter Feaver called the "civil-military problematique"⁷ has not been solved in the Turkish case well into the early 2000s, because the military has controlled the civilians for at least the last 40 years.

Historically, the military has been at the centre of the modernization process since the late 19th century, when the Young Turk experience in particular established precedents for military

⁵Eric Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments*, Englewood-Cliffs, NJ, 1977, p. 3.

⁶Amos Perlmutter, *Political Roles and Military Rulers*, London, Frank Cass, 1981, p.11-13, 19

⁷Peter Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces & Society*, 23/2 (Winter 1996).

activism.⁸ Moreover, the Republic was established by the military officers whose central figures were Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü. However, after the establishment of the Republic the military's role was overshadowed by the strong leadership of Atatürk and, after his death in 1938, by İnönü. The second President, İnönü, controlled the military under the command of the Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak who retained his post until 1944. This period is called a civil-military coalition.⁹ The military did not play an effective role in Turkish politics until the 1950s since the Republic was in the hands of the elites who established it.

The series of military coups have determined the progress of the Turkish political system and have had significant implications for the civil-military relations and the role of the military as decision-makers in domestic and foreign policy. After the 1960 and 1980 coups new constitutions were promulgated (in 1961 and 1982), and with every military intervention, the legal and de facto powers of the military have been consolidated. Since these interventions received public justification, they also endorsed the military as an actor of the political system and guardian of the regime. This gave the military courage and self-confidence for future interventions. Then, with the establishment of the National Security Council according to the 1961 Constitution, the military's active involvement in politics has become increasingly legitimized.

Although the Turkish military accepts the legitimacy of civilian authority in principle,¹⁰ it both intervened in the political process, and by using various mechanisms, controlled and infiltrated into crucial civilian institutions. Until the election of Turgut Özal, the presidency was reserved for generals,¹¹ either retired or as a leader of a coup. Until the late 1990s the director of the National Intelligence Organization (*MIT*) is appointed from the rank and file of the military, and almost half of its personnel is derived from the military. Beside these important positions held by career military personnel,

⁸George Harris, "The Role of the Military in Turkey: Guardians or Decision-Makers?," in Heper and Evin, "State, Democracy...," p. 180.

⁹Hale, "Türkiye'de Ordu ...," p. 261.

¹⁰Sakallıoğlu, "The Anatomy of Turkish ...," p. 153.

¹¹Except Celal Bayar in the 1950s.

starting in the 1980s a general has had a seat in the centralized Higher Education Council (YOK), in the Atatürk Foundation for History, Culture, and Language, on the Radio-Television Higher Council (RTUK), and until 1999 a military judge participated in the State Security Courts which were established in 1980.

The Turkish military institutionally regards itself as the guardian and protector of the republic. As Nordlinger puts it “the military have a special responsibility, a crucial mission that transcends their obligations to existing authorities. This is praetorianism’s basic rationale.”¹² The military officers unequivocally state that the military is an important institution because it founded the republic.¹³ This is what Koonings and Kruijt call “birthright principle,” that the military is perceived to have been present and indispensable at the birth of the nation.¹⁴ The Turkish army has been fundamentally oriented to the fate of the nation, the national destiny, and national progress. Therefore, the military, which is institutionally the most cohesive and organized group in Turkey, holds itself responsible for the destiny of the state. While it is *part* of the state machinery, it identified itself with the *whole*, i.e., the state, and considered any social development which it deemed contrary to the principles set out by Atatürk as a threat to the regime.

This mission of the military is embodied in its internal rules. Article 35 of the Internal Code of the Turkish Armed Forces stipulates that “the task of the armed forces is to protect and safeguard (*korumak ve kollamak*) the Turkish mainland and the Turkish Republic” which according to the military, provided the legal basis for its interventions and interference in politics.

Even if there had not been any legal basis for action, the military argues that it had the authority to act according to the unwritten rule of “self-assuming task in a situation” (*durumdan vazife*

¹²Nordlinger, “Soldiers in Politics ...,” p. 20.

¹³*Hürriyet*, January 9, 1999; *Sabah*, June 25, 1998.

¹⁴Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, ed., *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, London, Zed Books, 2002, p. 19.

çıkarmak).¹⁵ The military widely used this phrase during the political campaign against the Islamist Welfare party government in 1996-97. Indeed, this small phrase epitomizes the praetorian character of the Turkish military.

The military's role in Turkish politics has not been questioned nor criticized openly until the late 1990s, and on the contrary, it has been sanctioned by the Turkish public. While the Turkish military has displayed a praetorian character, the Turkish social and political culture praises the military and militaristic values. An important indication of that has been the public endorsement of military coups. It is also visible in the ceremonies held when young conscripts dispatch for obligatory military service, and the respect given to career officers.¹⁶ The tradition of stressing the unity of the nation with its army, is a rhetoric widely used by both the military and some civilians.¹⁷ This outlook places the military into a "sacred" position embedded within the already "sacred state" conception. Hence, the military's autonomous position within the political system is reinforced by the public support it receives and this has been a factor for its active role in politics.

What sharply distinguishes the Turkish military from other militaries is its involvement in Turkish economy through the Armed Forces' Trust and Pension Fund, OYAK (*Ordu Yardımlaşma Kurumu*). Established in 1961, after the coup, this organization's funds accumulated by 10 per cent contributions of its members' salaries. Channelling the funds to industrial investments, (it has shares in the automotive industry, in cement, transport, and food industries and in insurance and banking) OYAK has become a big holding company over the years, its annual turnover reaching five

¹⁵Hikmet Özdemir, *Rejim ve Asker*, Istanbul, Afa Yayinlari, 1989, pp.217-220.

¹⁶James Brown, "The Military and Society: The Turkish Case," *Middle Eastern Studies*, (1989), p. 392.

¹⁷*Devletin Kavram ve Kapsamı*, Ankara, MGK Genel Sekreterligi, 1990, p. 154; Hamdi Ertuna, "Devlet Yönetiminde Ordunun Rolü," *İkinci Askeri Tarih Semineri*, Ankara, Genelkurmay Basimevi, 1985, p. 331. For the historical roots of this phenomenon see Mevlut Bozdemir, *Türk Ordusunun Tarihsel Kaynakları*, Ankara, SBF, 1982, pp.23-28.

billion dollars.¹⁸ OYAK is run by professional civilian managers and not directly managed by the officers.

The Rise of Internal Threats in the 1990s

During the 1990s, three important developments have contributed to the military's growing role in Turkish politics which eventually affected its role in the making of foreign policy. First, although Turkey had been fighting against Kurdish separatists since 1984, the conflict intensified due to the power vacuum which occurred in northern Iraq after the Gulf War. Secondly, the rise of political Islam in the 1990s eventually brought the Islamist Welfare Party to power. And thirdly, political instability resulted in the inability of the civilian politicians to cope with the political and economic crises and political corruption in this period.

The rise of the political Islam, which gained momentum in the 1990s, caused great concern among the military officers as well as the secular-minded civilian politicians and the public. When the Welfare Party came to power in June 1996 in a coalition government with Tansu Ciller's True Path Party, this was the first occasion in the history of the Republic in which an Islamist leader became prime minister. This event brought the polarization of the political system between the Islamists, represented by the Welfare Party and the secular segments of society, including large sections of the mass media and parts of the bureaucracy spearheaded by the military. The military took a very strong stand against the government and contrary to a well-established principle, the generals began to spell out their discontent with the government openly, even to the extent of reprimanding local administrators of the Welfare Party and accusing the Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan of trying to introduce an Islamic regime. Basing its initiatives on the Article 35 of the Turkish Armed Forces Code¹⁹ the Chief of General Staff organized briefings to which top level bureaucrats, journalists and academics were invited and briefed by the officers about the threats to the secular Republic of

¹⁸Birand, "Emret Komutanım," pp.278-280; *Business Week*, (Istanbul), March 29, 1998, pp. 24-29.

¹⁹*Sabah*, June 12, 1997.

the rising political Islam (including the incumbent government, the Islamist media and Islamist financial and economic institutions, and the *Imam-Hatip* schools).²⁰ These briefings turned into anti-government political demonstrations to accentuate the military's determination to protect the secular system and to display the support given to it by the other institutions and groups. The armed forces asserted that the radical Islamists were trying to undermine the secular Republic in cooperation with the PKK and its supporters, and that these Islamists were supported by Iran, Libya, Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

The tension between the government and the military reached its peak on February 28, 1997 when the National Security Council (NSC) convened for a regular meeting and the generals introduced 18 measures in order to eliminate the danger of Islamic fundamentalism. The civilian members of the NSC, ironically including Islamist Prime Minister Erbakan, had to sign the final decisions.

Declaring political Islam to be the biggest threat to the regime, the military waged a political struggle not only against the government but also against Islamist groups such as *tarikats* [the Islamic orders], Islamic business and media.²¹ Consequently, Erbakan was forced to resign, under pressure from the generals. Although the military did not take direct control of the government, the "28 February process" was named a "quasi coup" or a "postmodern coup."

The political instability of the 1990s, helped the military to emerge as the most viable and prestigious institution. There were five successive governments in the 1990s and Turkey has had 11 foreign ministers within a decade. The Susurluk scandal, revealed in November 1996, in which a criminal ultra nationalist and a police chief were killed and a member of parliament severely injured in a car accident, especially tarnished the image of politicians and the

²⁰See Ali Osman Egilmez for the text of the briefing. *Brifingteki Irtica*, Ankara, Tema Yayinlari, 1997, pp.105-132.

²¹For instance, the military urged the government not to allow the Islamist companies to enter the public bids and to ban purchase from these companies. *Milliyet*, December 24, 1997; *Hürriyet*, December 24, 1997.

security forces since it unraveled the huge network of underground and illegal connections ranging from drug trafficking to casinos. Although the corruption charges have never been proved, this event turned out to be a symbol of political decay and corruption, with some politicians gaining a reputation as personal profit-seekers with connections to organized crime.

Thus, the overall picture of the 1990s prepared the ground for the military to consolidate its position within the political system. The political void was quickly filled by the armed forces which according to public opinion polls,²² were named as Turkey's most reliable institution. This situation facilitated the military's involvement in politics because as Perlmutter puts it, a modern praetorian government is most likely to develop when civilian institutions lack legitimacy.²³

The fact that the military's role in foreign policy expanded at the time when the military declared that internal threats (i.e., the political Islam and ethnic secessionism) replaced external threats seems paradoxical. However, as argued in this article, having strong credentials in domestic politics, the military translated its enhanced autonomy to gain more influence in the area of foreign policy.

The Military's Perception of National Security and Foreign Policy

It is a generally accepted fact that the "military mind" is different than the civilian mind or outlook.²⁴ Military officers collectively represent a pattern, they have in common the habit of command discipline and the mental outlook of military training. The military mind views world affairs solely in the perspective of preparedness for war and is opposed to public debate, dissent and

²²*Radikal*, March 3, 1997.

²³Perlmutter, "Political Roles...", p. 13.

²⁴Burton Sapin and Richard Snyder, *The Role of the Military in American Foreign Policy*, New York, Doubleday, 1954, p. 19-20; Roger Hilsman, *The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1990, p. 203; Birand, "Emret Komutanim," pp.126-27.

disagreement. They are after neat solutions based on either-or propositions.²⁵ As military influence has increased, so naturally has the opportunity for this type of thinking to shape foreign policy.

The Turkish military is no exception to this general outlook. As a former army general stated in his book about the rise of political Islam, "the military cannot handle a problem as a social issue, an officer is not a social scientist, he regards those who pose the threat as an 'internal enemy' who may be even more dangerous than external enemies".²⁶

However, two points should be stressed at this point. First, although it is possible to talk about a distinct military mind, this outlook is definitely not exclusive to the military. Many civilians may have a similar or even stricter outlook, a type called the "civilian militarist."²⁷ This became evident when some civilian politicians urged the generals for military intervention before the 1980 coup in Turkey,²⁸ or when some academics and writers have taken more hard-line stance on critical issues. Second, although the military, in general, is institutionally inclined to exaggerate threat perceptions, their strategic and security evaluations might coincide with reality, as happened in many cases in Turkish security issues in the 1990s.

An important characteristic of the Turkish military's security perception is the unity of the internal and external threats. During the Cold War the socialists were regarded as the proxy of the Soviet Union. The Islamists were seen as the extension of Iran's and Saudi Arabia's intentions to create an Islamic state in Turkey. And lastly, PKK was regarded as merely a tool of hostile countries which was created, supported and, to some extent directed by these countries with the aim to destabilize and, if possible, to break up the country. In fact, there is an element of truth in this last example to some extent: it

²⁵Sapin and Snyder, "Role of Military...", p.20.

²⁶Nevzat Bölügeray, *28 Şubat Süreci*, İstanbul, Tekin Yayınevi, 1999, p. 60-61.

²⁷Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Rethinking the Civil-Military Relations Paradigm: The Inverse Relation Between Militarism and Praetorianism Through the Example of Israel," *Comparative political Studies*, (June 1997), p. 358.

²⁸Birand, "Emret Komutanım," pp. 476-77.

was no secret that the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan found a shelter in Damascus for more than a decade and was captured shortly after he left the Greek embassy in Kenya with a passport issued by Greek Cypriots. However, the externalization of problems as well as applying a uni-dimensional approach (that is, military force) to them, have had devastating effects on the diagnosis and handling of these issues.

According to the military, Turkey is a country under constant threat.²⁹ The military believes that Turkey is encircled by internal and external threats and therefore that Turkey is a unique country in the world. This threat perception has a threefold characteristic: first, historically the big powers have been determined to destabilize Turkey. For this purpose, so it is believed, they used the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire in the 1910s and Armenian terrorists in the 1970s, and when the Armenian terrorism was eliminated, the PKK was introduced by these powers.³⁰ Second, the countries that pose threats to Turkey are not only the somewhat rival and hostile neighbors such as Greece, Syria and Iran but also some of Turkey's NATO allies are considered as countries that threaten Turkey's political stability and territorial integrity. This is a long list which includes NATO members such as France, Britain, Holland, Germany and Italy. These countries are seen to have resorted to different tactics and methods to weaken Turkey ranging from using allegations of human rights violations, providing political support for the PKK to forcing Turkey to accept unilateral concessions in Cyprus and the Aegean. Third, according to this perception, those countries may occasionally cooperate with each other. This can take the form of a religious encirclement such as that between Greece and Russia (the orthodox Christians), joined by Armenia, and sometimes an "unholy alliance" like Greek-Syrian cooperation and the European Union's support for Greece in its problems with Turkey.³¹

²⁹For instance Sami Kohen, *Milliyet*, December 3, 1997.

³⁰See for instance, former Navy Commander Güven Erkaya, *Aydınlık*, September 14, 1997; *Türkiye'nin Savunma Politikası ve Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri*, Ankara, 1996, chp. 4.

³¹Yılmaz Tezcan, "Avrasya Üzerindeki Güç Mücadelesi ve Türkiye," *Savunma*, (August-September 1998), pp.61-65;

In contrast to general NATO trends, with the end of the Cold War the Turkish military considers threats against Turkey to have increased and intensified, surrounding Turkey with a "circle of fire." Turkey, the "southern flank" of the Cold War era, has turned into a "front" country in the new period.³² This evaluation of security and foreign policy made Turkey a country where both its regime and territorial integrity are under constant threat by internal/external enemies.

The Turkish armed forces maintain a suspicion toward civilians especially on issues of national security. In the military estimation, crucial security and foreign policy issues should not be left to the discretion of the politicians since they are vulnerable to sectarian interests. Instead, these have to be handled by such an institution as the military which is above the tricks of daily politics. This is why the military insists that national security issues should be bipartisan and above narrow political interests.³³ For the military, foreign policy is a matter of existence and survival (*beka*) and it is considered solely a national security issue. For this reason, the conception of "national/state policy" has been developed to prevent any change by a newly elected government in established and formulated policies regarding delicate foreign policy issues.³⁴

However, not only about the politicians does the military feel insecure but also about the important role diplomats play in the formation and execution of foreign policy. The military has alluded that the Foreign Affairs bureaucracy has been adopting a more conciliatory stance. Some of these differences have even reflected in the news media. For instance, when the Foreign Ministry agreed not to use the German armoured vehicles in the southeast of Turkey, the military was frustrated by such a pledge.³⁵ In another instance, the General Staff criticized the Foreign Ministry for not taking a strong stance toward Greece on the Aegean issue, and argued that the

³²"Değişen Dünya Dengeleri," p. 101; Çevik Bir, "21.Yüzyıldan Türkiye'ye Bakış," *Ulusal Strateji*, (November-December 1999), pp. 6-7.

³³"Devletin Kavram ...," p.43.

³⁴"Devletin Kavram...," p. 43. See also Former Chief of General Staff Necip Torumtay, *Milliyet*, February 17, 1997.

³⁵*Hürriyet*, June 10, 1992.

Aegean would be lost if Turkey continues this policy.³⁶ And most recently, the military has reacted against a plan prepared by the Foreign Ministry for the solution of the Cyprus problem.³⁷

While perceiving threats from every direction, the military has, paradoxically, designed a more active international role for Turkey in the post-Cold War world. The generals argue that Turkey has to situate itself in the "new world" as a strong country, a regional power and even a world power which has the capacity to shape regional events.³⁸ As the deputy Chief of Staff reiterated, Turkey is producing security and strategy, and has a stabilizing factor in the unstable regions surrounding it.³⁹ Turkey's geographic position, its strong armed forces and the relative weakness of its neighbors are considered big advantages for Turkey in the new international arena. This led to a more assertive role of the military and the huge defence projects which are estimated to reach 150 billion dollars in the next 25 years.⁴⁰

There is indeed nothing surprising about the military's world outlook and its perception of foreign policy, and this outlook may be shared, as previously stated, by some civilians and, more or less by other countries' militaries. But what distinguishes the Turkish military from the others is the degree of its involvement in the foreign policy process.

The Mechanisms of the Military's Foreign Policy Involvement

The Turkish military's involvement in the foreign policy-making process is made possible by various mechanisms. Naturally,

³⁶*Hürriyet*, January 8, 1997.

³⁷Mustafa Balbay, "Genelkurmay ile Dışışleri ve Hükümet Arasında Kıbrıs Konusunda Derin Görüş Ayrılığı Var" *Cumhuriyet*, December, 29, 2003, January 5, 2004; *Hurriyet*, January 5, 2004.

³⁸*21nci Yüzyilin İlk Çeyreginde Türkiye'nin Genel Vizyonu, Politikası ve Stratejisi*, Istanbul, Harb Akademileri, 2000, pp.1-6.

³⁹*Sabah*, March 17, 1998.

⁴⁰*Milliyet*, December 18, 1997.

the military is part of the foreign policy making process and its knowledge of technical matters, along with its evaluation of strategic factors and other countries' defense capabilities are required in this process. However, the military's participation in the foreign policy-making process in Turkey has shown different characteristics from cases in Western countries. It moved from consultation to formation and occasionally to the execution of foreign policy.

The most effective mechanism for the military's involvement in foreign policy is the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC was established in 1961 and its powers were enhanced and the number of generals increased with each intervention. While the NSC has the power solely to "convey" its opinions to the council of ministers, according to the 1961 Constitution, this term was changed to "recommend" in the amendment made after the 1971 intervention, and the council of ministers has to give "priority" to its decisions according to the article 118/3 of the 1982 Constitution. According to the Law no. 2945 issued in November 1983, the NSC is responsible for the determination of the national security policy and preparation of defense policy.⁴¹ The NSC sets the agenda of the government on matters ranging from privatization to programs on TV stations, from education to the contents of the posters advertising Turkey abroad.⁴²

The NSC is not a part of the civilian authority but has become a device designed to control the civilian government by the military.⁴³ Although it is an institution composed of civilian and military representatives, it provides the military with the powers to implement its praetorian functions as evidenced by the automatic approval of its decisions by successive governments.

Especially important in this context is the General Secretariat of the NSC which is headed by a general. The General Secretariat has broad powers especially in shaping the agenda of NSC meetings. Until a change made at the end of 2003, it had the authority to follow up, control, direct and coordinate the implementation of the decisions

⁴¹Gencer, "Doksanlarda Türkiye'nin ...," p. 72.

⁴²Bülent Tanör, "MGK'nin İlgi Alanları," *Milliyet*, June 13, 1998; Oktay Eksi, *Hürriyet*, December 5, 1999.

⁴³Özdemir, "Rejim ve Asker," p. 241.

taken by the NSC on behalf of the president, prime minister and the NSC. As the former deputy General Secretary noted, this body functioned as a consultant to the prime minister,⁴⁴ and was sometimes defined as the "shadow prime minister."⁴⁵

However, with the ratification of the sixth and the seventh EU harmonization packages in August of 2003, the hitherto powers of the NSC were curbed to a great extent. The number of civilian members of the NSC had already been increased in a change made in 2000, so that the civilians outnumbered the generals. According to the recent changes the General Secretary of the NSC can be a civilian, a critical post which has been filled by a general so far. The important point is that the Secretary General of the NSC has lost the power to communicate directly with other government institutions on behalf of the prime minister. Besides, the NSC is to convene only one in every two months instead of its former monthly meetings. These changes have turned the NSC into a consultative body similar to its counterparts in democratic countries.

Related to the NSC are two important documents that draw the outline of the national security policy, shape foreign policy orientation and define threats posed by other states and/or groups. The first of these documents is the National Military Strategic Concept (NMSC) (*Milli Askeri Stratejik Konsept-MASK*) which is prepared by the Chief of General Staff to determine its own defense requirements.⁴⁶ Although it is designed for the organizational, operational and logistical requirements of the armed forces, it also defines the threats and security priorities of the country. The Chief of Staff revised this document in 1992 (the threat of secessionism was added), and at the beginning of 1997 political Islam was included in the NMSC, which was approved at the annual meeting of the Supreme Military Council in May 1997.⁴⁷ The NMSC is an important document in the sense that it constituted the basis for an even more important and wider political document, the National Security Policy Document.

⁴⁴Suat Eren, *Cumhuriyet*, March 15, 1997.

⁴⁵Özdemir, "Rejim ve Asker," p. 126.

⁴⁶Birand, "Emret Komutanım," pp.355-56.

⁴⁷*Radikal*, November 11, 1997.

The National Security Policy Document (NSPD) (*Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi -MGSB*) was prepared under the coordination of the General Secretariat of the National Security Council with the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Intelligence Organization (*MIT*). While the NSPD defines security threats, there are detailed security documents for each threat and the measures to be taken against them.

There are also "Special Policy Documents" designed to develop the policies and attitudes specifically for each critical security issue. For instance, since 1996, a Special Policy Document formed for northern Iraq gave the authority to the Chief of Staff and assigned the Special Forces Command to handle Turkey's interests in this region.⁴⁸

The national security policies of the state have to be in accordance with this and other related documents. No law or decree can be promulgated and no international agreement or treaty can be signed which would contradict the basic principles of this document. This document, which has been evolving since 1963, is revised every December of each year and renewed every five years in conjunction with internal and external developments. Although it must be approved by the Council of Ministers, it is not introduced in parliament because it is not a law itself.⁴⁹

On the military's initiative, a major change was made in the NSPD to define the threats and to shape the national security policy according to these threats in November 1997. It was declared that internal threats replaced the external ones and political Islam and Kurdish separatism are equally the primary threats to the nation. This was the first time that this confidential and top secret document was leaked to the press, most probably with the aim to squeeze the Islamists and to show the determination of the military to fight against political Islam.⁵⁰ The NSPD, sometimes called the "red

⁴⁸*Milliyet*, July 20, 2003.

⁴⁹Bölügiray, "28 Subat ...," p. 55-56.

⁵⁰*Hürriyet*, November 4, 1997. Other security priorities are enumerated as the ties between ultra nationalists and the organized crime, possible

booklet," is criticized as being a "hidden constitution" and having an undemocratic character since it is prepared by the bureaucracy with the heavy imprint of the military. Particularly the Social Democrats and, in the recent years the Islamists, criticize the existence and influence of both documents and their determining effects on the political life in Turkey, while the center-right parties take an ambivalent stance which changes according to the political atmosphere in the country.⁵¹ The then Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan criticized the preparation of NMSC by the military, claiming that this document binds all the governmental agencies and therefore it cannot be set by the military alone and has to be prepared in consultation with, and participation of the government.⁵²

The military argues that approval of NSPD by the Council of Ministers provides the legal basis for the document which makes it a governmental decree. Besides, many politicians, including Tansu Ciller and Erbakan, although harsh critics of the document, approved it when they were in power.⁵³

During the period of high tension between the Islamist Erbakan government and the military, the Prime Ministry Crisis Management Center (PCMC), was established in January 1997, defining crises as the "attitudes and actions against the integrity of the state and nation, and to the democratic order, and social violence, natural disasters, air pollution, migration flows, severe economic crises and huge demographic changes." Although the Center is subordinate to the prime minister, it is organized by the General Secretariat of the National Security Council which has the authority to follow up the crisis situations, to report them and to prepare the necessary precautions.⁵⁴ A Crisis Coordination Council was

cooperation between Greece and Syria in case of a conflict, and Turkey's need to strengthen its ties with the Central Asian republics.

⁵¹For instance the leader of the Social Democrat Party Deniz Baykal stated that Turkey has an "open" constitution and that there should not be any hidden constitution whatsoever. *Sabah*, November 7, 1997.

⁵²Gencer Özcan, *Onbir Aylık Saltanat; Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Dis Politikada Rafahyol Dönemi*, Istanbul, Boyut, 1998, pp. 220-21.

⁵³*Hürriyet*, November 7, 1997.

⁵⁴*Milliyet*, September 13, 1997.

established inside the Center which has the authority to propose the declaration of martial law and even war to the related organs.⁵⁵

With this body the military's influence have both covered broader areas and become even more encompassing. Like the establishment of the NSC after the 1960 coup, this has been the institutionalization of the military's praetorianism at a time when political crisis reached its peak in 1996-97, eventually resulting in the resignation of the Islamist led government.

As a sign of the interest and involvement in foreign (and domestic) policy the Chief of General Staff has formed various departments such as "Internal Security Department" and "Eastern Working Group" for the fight against the PKK, "Barbaros Working Group" when the Greek Cypriots decided to purchase S-300 missiles, "Trust Working Group" for the Cyprus issue in general and the "Western Working Group" for the rise of the political Islam.⁵⁶ The term "Western" was chosen on purpose to show the Western orientation of the country.

Apart from these institutionalized mechanisms, an important development which took place in the 1990s was normalization of public declarations of the high ranking military officers criticizing, warning and complaining about other countries. For instance, Iran was branded as a terrorist state, and Chief of General Staff Ismail H. Karadayi sent a letter to the NATO members criticizing Russia.⁵⁷ Generals on many occasions issued stern "warnings" to Greece, Iran, Syria, called for a solution and asked for the start of a negotiation process for the existing problems, and expressed their opinions on various issues of Turkish foreign policy.⁵⁸ It is interesting that statements and headlines such as the "military's foreign policy," or "General Staff raged about the Greeks"⁵⁹ became commonplace in this period.

⁵⁵*Milliyet*, September 21, 1997.

⁵⁶Bölügiray, "28 Subat ...," pp.151-52.

⁵⁷*Sabah*, October 31, 1997.

⁵⁸*Sabah*, October 31, 1997.

⁵⁹*Milliyet*, February 28, 1998.

The Turkish Military as a Foreign Policy Practitioner

The Regional Missions

The Turkish armed forces have assumed various roles in the implementation of Turkish foreign policy, whether the decisions are taken by the civilian government or by the military itself. These roles include carrying out the negotiation processes and signing of technical/educational agreements with other countries, executing cross-boundary operations in northern Iraq, participating in peacekeeping operations, and providing military training for foreign personnel in Turkey and in other countries.

Recent international developments have required the military to acquire new roles such as participating in post-conflict reconstruction efforts and peacemaking missions. The first experience the Turkish military had in this period was Somalia, Operation Restore Hope, in 1993 where the operation was headed by Çevik Bir, an influential general of the mid-1990s. The Turkish navy and air force have also engaged in military operations in the Balkans both in Bosnia and in Kosovo in enforcing the no-fly zone and the arms embargo, and in performing surveillance missions especially in the military operations against the Serbs in Bosnia and in Yugoslavia. Turkish troops have also been deployed as part of the peacekeeping missions in Bosnia (under IFOR-Implementation Force and SFOR-Stabilization Force), in Kosovo (under KFOR-Kosovo Force), and in Palestine throughout the 1990s. The Turkish military also assumed the command of the ISAF in Afghanistan in 2002.

The Turkish military also participated in peacetime regional military force structures such as the Southeast Europe Multinational Force (SEEMNF), established in May 1998, and initiated the Blackseaforce to enhance cooperation in the Black Sea region in October 1998.

With the establishment of the Training Center of Partnership for Peace in June of 1998 Turkish military has been training military personnel from 32 countries since.⁶⁰ These developments have

⁶⁰*Ulusal Strateji*, (September-October 1999), p. 12.

naturally made the military an active participant in the decision-making process and enhanced their official contacts with other countries. However, the Turkish military's influential role in foreign policy was felt in more crucial areas such as the relations with the US, Israel and Greece, and in the Cyprus and Kurdish issues.

The Military and the US

The Turkish military occupies a central role in relations with the US since Turkey's relations with that country are based primarily on military and strategic ties. The military's direct links with the US cover many areas such as military training, US military aid and arms procurement and military planning in NATO.

The "German school" within the Turkish military of the 1930s was replaced in the 1950s by a group of military officers who adopted the US style of training, as the US military assistance started and Turkey's relations with the US developed rapidly. This group constituted the top ranking generals in the 1980s. For instance, both former Chiefs of General Staff Necip Torumtay and Necdet Öztörün were awarded medals by the US President Reagan.⁶¹ According to a US report, the Pentagon's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program trained around 2,900 Turkish soldiers, navy officers and pilots since 1984.⁶²

Beside military training, the US has been the biggest arms supplier to Turkey since 1947. Nearly 90 percent of Turkey's arms inventory is of US origin. Since its accession into NATO in 1952, Turkey has been one of the staunchest allies of the US and the Turkish military has been the backbone of the military relations covering a wide area from maintaining the military facilities in Turkey, to the formation of High Level Defence Council (established in 1982) in which a general represents Turkey and a civilian

⁶¹2000'e Doğru, 14-20 June 1987; Ufuk Güldemir, *Texas-Malatya*, Istanbul, Tekin Yayinlari, 1992, p. 429.

⁶²Tamar Gabelnick, William D. Hartung, and Jennifer Washburn, *Arming Repression: U.S. Arms Sales to Turkey During the Clinton Administration*, A Joint Report of the World Policy Institute and the Federation of American Scientists, October 1999.

represents the US side. Due to the cooperation and partnership both within NATO and in bilateral relations Turkish military officers could develop close personal contacts with US officers both during their terms in NATO headquarters in Brussels and in NATO bases and facilities in Turkey.

Despite close ties between the US and Turkish military, relations between them showed the signs of deterioration in the 1990s. Generally speaking, the US placed particular importance on its ties with the Turkish military due to the Turkish political instability and frequently changing governments. Therefore, maintaining strong ties with top generals, who had influence in foreign affairs, was considered a viable choice for the US.⁶³ The Turkish military, on the other hand, though avoiding any rupture in relations,⁶⁴ has become increasingly critical of US policies toward Turkey in the post-Cold War era. This change of attitude resulted mainly from the US policies regarding the Kurdish issue and the rise of political Islam in Turkey.

Like many politicians and other segments of the Turkish public, the military too developed a deep suspicion that the US intended to establish a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. These allegations came during and immediately after the Gulf War of 1991 especially after the Turkish Chief of Staff Necip Torumtay resisted President Turgut Özal's order to open a so-called "second front" in northern Iraq and resigned from his post, a unique case in Turkish history.⁶⁵ The resignation of Torumtay was praised as a democratic action by the military and in this unusual case, while the military represented the cautious and restrained position, a civilian, Özal, displayed a somewhat aggressive attitude based on military force.⁶⁶

⁶³Mehmet Ali Birand, "ABD, TSK ile İlişkiyi Ciddiye Alıyor," *Sabah*, April 16, 1998; see also Güldemir, "Texas-Malatya," pp. 419-442.

⁶⁴It is argued in *The Wall Street Journal* that the Turkish generals canceled a meeting with Pentagon officials as a reaction. June 17, 1997.

⁶⁵Necip Torumtay, *Orgeneral Necip Torumtay'ın Anıları*, Istanbul, *Milliyet*, 1994, pp.109-112, 115.

⁶⁶Ilhan Uzgel, "Türk Dış Politikasında Sivilleşme ve Demokratikleşme Sorunları: Körfez Krizi Örneği," *SBF Dergisi*, (January-December 1998), pp. 308-326.

The military played an important role in the implementation of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq under Operation Provide Comfort, Poised Hammer and Northern Watch missions all based mainly in the Incirlik base in south eastern Turkey. The no fly zone mission was terminated after the Iraqi invasion in 2003.⁶⁷

The US State Department's critical reports on human rights violations in Turkey, and the banning of the sale of Cobra attack helicopters, and the delaying the delivery of three Perry class warships emerged as further thorny issues between the military and the US.

These developments were accompanied by the somewhat supportive attitude of the US toward the moderate Islamists in Turkey. The US administration declared that it was concerned with the closure of the Welfare Party,⁶⁸ the US provided tacit support for what is called the moderate Islamist Fethullah Gülen group⁶⁹ and the US Consul in Istanbul visited the mayor of Istanbul (Tayyip Erdoğan who later became the head of the Justice and Development Party and became Prime Minister in 2003) who had been indicted on fundamentalist charges.⁷⁰ These developments led to Turkish confusion about US policies toward the Islamists in Turkey.⁷¹

It has been argued that the military's role in relation to the US has changed drastically from compliance to defiance, that the Turkish military returned to its original function set out by Atatürk and, just like it did in the 1920s, is waging a national struggle against the

⁶⁷Carol Migdalovitz, "Turkey's Kurdish Imbroglio and US Policy," *CRS Report*, March 18, 1994.

⁶⁸*Daily Press Briefing*, Department of State, January 16, 1998; Mehmet Ali Birand, "ABD'nin Refah ve Fetullah'a Bakışı," *Sabah*, April 15, 1998.

⁶⁹Fetuhllah Gülen is residing in the US. See for the excerpts of the report prepared by the General Staff *Hürriyet*, June 22, 1999.

⁷⁰*The New York Times* defined the case of Erdogan as "the most visible victim of an intensifying campaign against what military commanders and their civilian allies say is Islamic fundamentalism." March 25, 1999.

⁷¹Bölügiray, "28 Subat ...," pp. 173-74; See for disagreement between the military and the US. Judith Yaphe, *Turkey's Domestic Affairs; Shaping the US-Turkey Strategic Partnership*, INSS, no.121 July 1997.

Western countries.⁷² For instance, according to Ahmet Taner Kışlalı the military was deceived by the US during the military regime established after the 12 September coup, the US encouraged the use of Islam against communism, and therefore many of the problems Turkey is facing today are mainly the result of these policies.⁷³ Now, the army of the 1980s has changed and, as Kışlalı puts it, the military is aware of the fact that Western countries are trying to reimpose the Sévres Treaty which envisaged the breaking up of the Ottoman Empire to open the way for establishing Armenia and a Kurdish state in Anatolia.⁷⁴

This line of argument, which has its roots in the leftist version of Kemalist thought, represents the military as a bulwark against globalism which requires weak nation-states. Therefore, the military, beginning from the 1990s, has been breeding the idea that secular public and institutions should rally around it in its struggle against these international pressures for broader rights for ethnic groups, and reconciliation toward moderate Islam.

It is possible to see the indications of the military's discontent with the US policies in a 1999 booklet published by the Chief of General Staff. The booklet lists the following major concerns: the US allowed the opening of a Kurdish institute in the US while there is not any Turkish institute, banned the sale of the Cobra attack helicopters, did not take any measures against the Greek and Armenian lobbies which work against Turkey and teaching of Armenian genocide in some schools in the US, and finally that US policy is based on double standard on human rights issues.⁷⁵

⁷²These include the social democratic intellectuals centered around the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper and former leftists the *Aydinlik* group.

⁷³Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, "Artık 12 Eylül Askeri Yok," *Cumhuriyet*, August 16, 1998. Kışlalı was assassinated in November 1999 and military ordered the officers to attend his funeral.

⁷⁴For the allegedly US plans to create a Kurdish state in northern Iraq and the reaction of the Chief of General Staff to these plans see Hasan Böğün, "ABD Belgelerinde Türk Genelkurmayı," *Teori*, (April 1998), p. 10-56; Doğu Perinçek, *Avrasya Seçeneği*, Istanbul, Kaynak Yayınları, 1996, pp.94-102.

⁷⁵*Güncel Sorunlar*, Ankara, Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, 1999. Excerpts *Sabah*, November 11, 1999; *Hürriyet*, January 9, 1999.

There were also indirect signs in the US attitude toward the Turkish military toward the end of the 1990s. While the US newspapers such as *The New York Times* criticized the generals as being meddlesome and inclined to human rights violations, masterminding the occupation of the Northern Cyprus and waging a bloody war against the Kurds,⁷⁶ the influential experts on Turkey such as Henri Barkey argued that the Turkish military is a barrier to overcoming the political crisis Turkey has been through in the 1990s. During the political crisis in 1996-97 the US officially warned the Turkish military not to stage a coup.⁷⁷

It seems paradoxical that all these disagreements, suspicions and concerns developed while Turkey cooperated with the US widely in the Balkans, the Caucasus-Central Asia and became the crucial ally in the “double containment” policy toward Iraq and Iran which required the military’s active participation.

Before the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, when the US demanded to use Turkish territory to make inroads into the northern Iraq, the Turkish Parliament voted down the request. This normal, democratic process in itself was severely criticized by the US and interestingly, the Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz openly accused the Turkish Armed Forces for its lack of strong leadership which had been expected from them in this critical moment.⁷⁸ Worse still, the US soldiers raided the office of the Turkish Special Forces in Suleimania, in northern Iraq, and detained 11 Turkish officers for more than 24 hours. Because this operation seemed to be timed to coincide with the 4th of July, 2003, Turkish officials could not reach any senior American counterparts to discuss the issue, and this event has dealt a serious blow to the relations between the two countries. Grounding their allegations on the “preparation of a plot against the Kurdish major of the town” the US conducted a raid which seemed to

⁷⁶*New York Times*, March 25, 1997, see also in a somewhat less critical tone Douglas Frantz, “Military Bestrides Turkey’s Path to the European Union,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 2001.

⁷⁷*Daily Press Briefing*, Department of State, June 16, 1997.

⁷⁸Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz’s interview with CNN Turk, www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030506-depsecdef0156.html

target and humiliate the Turkish Armed Forces as well as exacting revenge for the refusal to allow the US troop passage during the Iraqi invasion.

The Military in the Turkish-Greek Disputes and the Cyprus Problem

Turkish-Greek relations and the Cyprus problem have been main areas of the military's involvement in foreign policy since the early 1960s. These two interrelated problems have been the main security issues for Turkey and the two countries have come to the brink of war many times in the last 40 years, in 1974 during Turkey's intervention in Cyprus, in March 1987 and in 1996 over the disputes in the Aegean, and in the second instance, Turkish forces landed on a disputed islet in the Aegean.

The Turkish military's approach to problems with Greece is based on the stereotype, which is also very common among the civilians, that Greece is an expansionist country whose foreign policy is shaped by the "megali idea" (the "great idea" of reclaiming the lost territories now in Turkey) and that Greece is traditionally backed by foreign countries.⁷⁹

Concerning the territorial waters dispute in the Aegean, Turkey's approach based on the declared "*casus belli*" policy. That means, if Greece extends its currently six miles territorial waters to 12 miles, Turkey considers this action as a reason for war. This approach automatically brings the military as the foremost important element in this particular issue.

⁷⁹*Yunanistan ile İlişkiler ve Türkiye ile Yunanistan Arasındaki Sorunlar ve Bu Sorunların Çözüm Yolları*, Ankara, Kara Harp Okulu Komutanlığı, 1999. *Milliyet*, February 22, 1997. However it should be noted that the same kind of stereotypes concerning Turkey are also strong among the Greeks. See Yannis Kapsis, "The Philosophy and Goals of PASOK's Foreign Policy," in Nikolaus Stavrou, ed., *Greece under Socialism: A NATO Ally Adrift*, New York, Aristide Caratzas, 1988, pp.45-57; Theodoros Pangalos, "Principles of Greek Foreign Policy," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, (Spring 1998), pp. 3-4.

As for the Cyprus problem, the military has long been arguing that Cyprus is a strategically vital issue for Turkey. This strategic consideration stems from the perception that Turkey's western and southern coasts should not be controlled by the same power, especially if it is not a very friendly neighbor such as Greece. This is considered as a strategic encirclement especially after the Greek and Greek Cypriot agreement on common defence in 1995. This was basically the reason for the Turkish military's strong reaction against the Greek Cypriot plans to deploy Russian made S-300 missiles on the island.

The military's approach to the issue became even clearer when Chief of General Staff Himli Özkök stated in early 2003 that "if Turkey loses Cyprus, the process of the Turks' imprisonment in Anatolia would be completed" and in an interview he pointed out that "in case any hostile power (i.e., Greece) maintains a stronghold on the island, especially when it uses its air force, Turkey's whole eastern region will be within its reach ... any air force deployed there is a big security threat for Turkey. And even membership in the EU will not provide any guarantee in such a situation. We have to have a wider vision."⁸⁰

The fact that Turkey maintains 30,000 troops on the island gives the military an upper hand in both shaping Turkey's position toward the issue and the political developments in Northern Cyprus.⁸¹ The military has had developed a close alliance with the strong leader of the Turkish Cypriots, Rauf Denktaş and has for a long time been able to preserve the status quo. From the strenuous efforts by the Özal governments in the 1980s, to a short lived attempt by the Çiller government in 1993-94 and to the well coordinated initiative by the Islamist Tayyip Erdoğan's government and the big business circles in the 2000s, the military resisted and vetoed any policy change up until the present.

⁸⁰Interview with Mehmet Ali Kışlalı, *Radikal*, November 9, 2003.

⁸¹For the securitization of the Cyprus issue, and societal security dimensions for the Turkish Cypriots see Pınar Tank, "Re-Solving' the Cyprus Problem: Changing Perceptions of State and Societal Security," *European Security*, 11/3 (Autumn 2002).

The Turkish military has not only played the leading role in the confrontational aspects of the relations, but also joined various reconciliation efforts in the late 1990s. The Chief of General Staff invited his Greek counterpart to Turkey,⁸² pushed for confidence-building measures in the Aegean, offered to hold joint exercises and prepared reports for possible solution of the problems between them. These efforts were most probably an attempt to ease the tension in the Aegean in order to intensify the fight against the Kurdish separatists.⁸³ Therefore, the military appeared both as the advocate of the hard-line policy, and if necessary, of reconciliation.

In general, the Turkish Armed Forces are the most important factor in Turkey's Greek policy and any policy change in this area would at least have to be approved by the military as this issue is regarded a "national and/or state policy."⁸⁴

Turkey's Growing Ties with Israel: And Alliance Forged by the Military

Turkey's growing relations with Israel in the 1990s have been the most striking example of the military's expanding role in conducting diplomacy. Coincidentally, the relations with Israel strengthened during the Islamist Welfare Party government, and the military took direct control of the relations with Israel in this period.

Although there were contacts between politicians and an expansion in economic ties especially after the Oslo Peace Process, military cooperation has been the most remarkable part of the relations with Israel that culminated in the signing of a military agreement in February 1996 and the official visits by the Chief of General Staff Ismail Hakkı Karadayı in February 1997, and Minister of National Defense and deputy Chief of Staff Çevik Bir in May

⁸²*Hürriyet*, November 4, 1997.

⁸³This was Turkey's fear of the "2 ½" war, that is a conflict with Syria or Greece would automatically draw the other, while the PKK is a constant half. Şükrü Elekdağ, '2 ½ War Strategy', *Perceptions*, I/1, (March – May 1996).

⁸⁴*Milliyet*, January 28, 1997.

1997. These contacts covered the modernization of F-4 fighters and M-60 tanks, the purchase of anti-terror equipment, missiles and intelligence gathering. The Islamist Prime Minister Erbakan, who had a strong anti-Israel stance, had to reluctantly sign the follow-up Defense Cooperation Agreement and the Chief of Staff urged him to hold an official meeting with the Israeli Foreign Minister during his visit to Ankara.⁸⁵

The military also led the efforts to calm the strong reactions of some Arab countries to the growing military ties between Turkey and Israel. The Chief of Staff Ismail Hakkı Karadayı sent a message to Egypt to explain the nature of the relations with Israel and deputy Chief of General Staff Çevik Bir visited Jordan to include this country in military cooperation with Israel.⁸⁶

For a while in the mid-1990s there has been a two-layered structure in the making and execution of foreign policy.⁸⁷ While the government was trying to make overtures to the Islamic countries such as the signing of a pipeline deal with Iran and to realize Erbakan's dream of establishing an Islamic commonwealth, during Erbakan's official visit to Libya, General Çevik Bir, who was perceived as the "foreign minister" of the armed forces at that time,⁸⁸ was simultaneously accusing Iran of being a "terrorist state" in a speech he delivered in the US.⁸⁹ Thus, the so-called "Turkish-Israeli axis" was initiated, negotiated and, to a great extent, conducted by the Turkish Armed Forces.

The "Military Solution" to the Kurdish Problem

The Kurdish problem has posed one of the biggest challenges to both the territorial integrity and the political system of Turkey. It

⁸⁵*Milliyet*, April 8, 1997.

⁸⁶*Milliyet*, December 2, 1997, April 19, 1998.

⁸⁷See Philip Robins, "Turkish Foreign Policy under Erbakan," *Survival*, 39/2 (Summer 1997), pp. 83-84.

⁸⁸Nicole pope, "Turkey's Generals Behind the Israel Axis," *Middle East International*, 16 May 1997, p.3.

⁸⁹*Milliyet*, February 21, 1997.

has not been an exclusively internal problem but also a foreign policy issue since it has affected Turkey's relations with its neighbors, rivals and allies alike.

In military discourse and practice there was not a "Kurdish" political problem but only a problem with PKK terrorists, thus there was no need to produce any political solution. The military force was taken as the only instrument required to solve the problem. While the military criticized politicians and especially the Özal governments (1983-91) of underestimating the urgency of the problem and of not taking necessary measures, the other countries including Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Greece, Armenia, and the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Russia, Denmark were criticized for providing direct and indirect support to the PKK.⁹⁰ Therefore, the Kurdish problem was seen a part of the general plot to weaken and destabilize Turkey and any reference to "political solution" or cultural rights is considered as the first step toward autonomy and eventually to a separate Kurdish state.⁹¹

The military's role in this problem ranged from the actual fighting to arms purchases and conducting diplomatic initiatives when and if necessary. Between 1984-1993, the fight against the PKK was carried under the control of the Interior Ministry, and the Chief of General Staff was only providing the necessary troops and equipment.⁹² Replacing the internal threat (i.e., the PKK) for the external threats based on the Soviet Union and Greece the armed forces prepared a "Strategic Internal Threat Report" in November 1992 based on the Article 35 of its internal regulations.⁹³ Then the military put into practice several measures in its fight against the PKK on its own initiative. As part of a diplomatic initiative, the Commander of the Gendarmerie, General Eşref Bitlis, went to Arbil

⁹⁰Burak Ülman, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Güvenlik Algılamaları ve Bölücülük," in Gencer and Kut, "En Uzun Onyıl...", p. 123.

⁹¹*Cumhuriyet*, July 3, 1997.

⁹²Interview with the former Chief of General Staff in Mehmet Ali Kışlalı, *Güneydoğu: Düşük Yoğunluklu Çatışma*, Ankara, Ümit Yayıncılık, 1996, pp.217-219.

⁹³Burak Ülman, "Türkiye'nin Yeni Güvenlik Algılamaları ve 'Bölücülük,'" Özcan and Kut, "En Uzun Onyıl...", p.121.

after the Turkish operation in the northern Iraq in 1992 and concluded an agreement with the Iraqi Kurdish authorities which envisaged the banning of the PKK's activities in the area.⁹⁴

Starting from 1993, Turkey has adopted a new strategy, what the Chief of General Staff Doğan Güreş named the "low intensity conflict," against the PKK. It moved from defensive to offensive strategy in the conflict, based on the concept of "field control," (until then the PKK was controlling much of the area especially at night time) deploying more troops, using infrared night vision equipment and attack helicopters.⁹⁵

The other leg of this policy was the cross-border operations into northern Iraq where the PKK increased its activities and launched its attacks. Turkey's operation in March 1995 was the biggest military action outside its borders involving around 50,000 troops. Yet the most striking development was the military's operation in northern Iraq in May 1997 which was carried out without even notifying the government at that time headed by the Welfare Party, claiming that it might leak the information to the PKK.⁹⁶ In another instance, the armed forces, launching an operation inside northern Iraq in April 1998, captured Şemdin Sakık, one of the leaders of the PKK, again without the prior knowledge of the government.⁹⁷ The important point in these two cross-border operations was that neither of the two governments (Erbakan in the first and Mesut Yılmaz in the second event were prime ministers) nor the public reacted to the military's decision to launch such operations, and Ecevit as deputy Prime Minister in 1998 stated that the Chief of General Staff did not need to consult the government for every action.⁹⁸

The developments which led to the expulsion of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from Syria was initiated by the Commander of Land Forces when he warned Syria during an inspection of the

⁹⁴Ümit Özdağ, *Türkiye, Kuzey Irak ve PKK*, Ankara, ASAM, 1999, p. 95.

⁹⁵*Milliyet*, October 11, 1998.

⁹⁶*Milliyet*, May 19, 1997.

⁹⁷*Milliyet*, April 14, 1998.

⁹⁸*Cumhuriyet*, April 15, 1998.

troops near the border that "Turkey has lost its patience and it is ready to take necessary measures (against Syria)."⁹⁹ During Öcalan's stay in Italy, the military severely criticized this country and other NATO members for their lax attitudes toward terrorism and the Chief of Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu publicly stated his anger, disappointment and feeling of betrayal.¹⁰⁰ While the capture of Öcalan¹⁰¹ and the eventual defeat of the PKK were important events in the development of the Kurdish question, they did not bring an immediate change in the military's role in this issue. The military, arguing that it has accomplished its duty successfully, urged the civilians to take measures and especially to foster the economic and social development of the region. The military still avoids any mention of cultural and political measures in the region and resisted proposals to lift the emergency rule in the Southeast of Turkey until the beginning of the 2000s.¹⁰²

***The Rise of Civil Society and the Issue of E.U. Membership:
toward the Retreat of the Military from Politics?***

Since the 1990s, the military's influential position in Turkish politics has begun to be challenged domestically by the rising civil society and externally by the EU and the US.

With the impressive economic boost realized during the Özal governments in the 1980s, the business circles sought to exert more influence on political power and along with the liberal policies, urged a more limited role for the state, including the military.

In the 1990s, while the leading businessmen talked about the adaptation of a "Basque model" for the solution of the Kurdish issue, the Turkish Chambers of Commerce and Stock Exchanges (TOBB) prepared a report on the Kurdish problem, taking a critical stance toward the government policy and also drawing parallels with the

⁹⁹*Milliyet*, September 17, 1998.

¹⁰⁰*Cumhuriyet*, December 15, 1998.

¹⁰¹For a detailed account of the operation. Tuncay Özkan, *Operasyon*, Istanbul, Doğan Kitap, 2000.

¹⁰²*Cumhuriyet*, January 1, 2000.

Basque region.¹⁰³ The Istanbul-based big business represented by TUSIAD (Turkish Businessmen's and Industrialists' Association) put forward its democratization package in January 1997, which openly called for a more limited role for the military. These suggestions included, *inter alia*, the subordination of the Chief of General Staff to the Defense Minister instead of the Prime Minister, and the abolition of the National Security Council and returning it to its pre-1960 formation whose powers, unlike the current constitutionally established NSC, should be defined by law. The Prime Ministry Crisis Management Center is, too, regarded an unconstitutional institution which needs to be abolished.¹⁰⁴

The military's reaction to the report was rather harsh. Although it did not directly address the report, the General Staff accused the proposals of unjustly attacking and discrediting the military and those who held such opinions either being in treason or in ignorance.¹⁰⁵

The well-organized Turkish business, as an influential pressure group, seems to have a different perception of world politics in the post-Cold War era. While the military stresses the importance of a strong Turkey that aspires to be a regional power, the business circles ask for an economic and trade-oriented foreign policy that manifests itself in the report prepared by TUSIAD named "Toward a New Economic and Trade Diplomacy Strategy in Turkey."¹⁰⁶

Liberal writers and commentators¹⁰⁷ have especially intensified their criticisms of the military's role in politics and human rights violations, and have started to question ambitious defense projects.

¹⁰³See Ümit Cizre Sakalhoğlu, "Historicizing the Present and Problematizing the Future of the Kurdish Problem: A Critique of the TOBB Report on the Eastern Question," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, (Spring 1996), pp. 1-22.

¹⁰⁴*Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Perspektifleri*, Istanbul, TUSIAD, 1997, pp. 82-85.

¹⁰⁵*Sabah*, January 28, 1997.

¹⁰⁶*Türkiye'de Yeni Bir Ekonomik ve Ticaret Diplomasi Stratejisine Dogru*, Istanbul, TUSIAD, 1998.

¹⁰⁷See for instance Cengiz Çandar, *Sabah*, November 30, 1997; Necati Dogru, *Sabah* March 9, 2000; Cüneyt Ülsever, *Hürriyet*, April 18, 2000; Aydın Engin, *Cumhuriyet*, December 12, 1997; Şahin Alpay, *Milliyet*, April 18, 2000.

The second challenge to the military's role in Turkish politics came from the EU which has generally been very critical of democratization and human rights problems in Turkey but has intensified its criticism after it named Ankara as a candidate in the EU's Helsinki Summit in December 1999.

The preconditions of the EU for Turkey's full membership put the military in a dilemma. The military has traditionally spearheaded Turkey's modernization efforts and its integration into the Western world. As one general stated, it is the direction the founder of the Republic, Kemal Atatürk, pointed to the Turkish people and integration in the EU is part of this project. It is worth recalling that despite the critical attitude of the EU toward the military regime between 1980-83, the generals took a decision that Turkey was committed to the membership in the EU.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, full membership in the EU would directly affect the military's status and role in the political system. The EU regards the National Security Council as an undemocratic institution.¹⁰⁹ Besides, the military is discontented with the EU's approach to the Kurdish problem and human rights issues as well as the EU's position on the Cyprus question and the Aegean dispute. In order to overcome this difficulty, the top brass argued that Turkey, unlike EU members, has its own characteristics which require the existence of such an institution.¹¹⁰

The Turkish military has lost its allies both domestically and externally. Big business supported the military's active role in politics in the early 1980s, but when it felt secure that there was no immanent social unrest threatening its position, it set itself the task of redesigning the Turkish society and polity which includes an "objective civilian control of the military." The military has engaged in a problematic relationship with small and medium scale business, which it considers to be "green capital" i.e., having Islamist

¹⁰⁸Mehmet Ali Birand, *Türkiye'nin Gümrük Birliği Macerası: 1959-1996*, Istanbul, Bilgi, pp. 374-78.

¹⁰⁹*The Economist*, March 16, 1997; *Sabah*, February 22, 1997.

¹¹⁰See for instance Ilter Türkmen, *Hürriyet*, December 28, 1999.

tendencies and acting as the financial backbone of political Islam in Turkey. This military attitude alienated these Anatolian based entrepreneurs. This led the military to cooperate with a small number of secular minded elites, most of whom come from bureaucratic backgrounds, though it also deals with some former socialists, some social democrats, and even some right-wing nationalists.

Externally, while the military's active role in politics was tolerated by the Western European countries for the sake of international strategic balances in the Cold War environment, in the post-Cold War era the place of the military in Turkish politics has been severely criticized and the reduction of the role of the military has been made one of the preconditions for an eventual candidacy status. And the US, long standing ally of the Turkish military, has in various ways asked for the withdrawal of the military from politics.

Although concerns over political Islam seem to continue into the present, Kurdish separatism has lost its momentum since the capture of Öcalan and stabilization of relations with Syria. In the absence of an immanent internal and external threat, the military's discourse that Turkey's peculiarities require them to play a greater role loses its rhetorical power.

A combination of these factors seems to lead the military to retreat to its original functions, the protection of the country from external threats, providing security, and a merely consultative role in the making of foreign and security policy.