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# Demythologizing The National Security Concept: The Case of Turkey

Ümit Cizre

*Since the second half of the 1990s, a new national security discourse in Turkey sanctifies security over democratic and developmental objectives. By organizing itself around the concepts and issues raised by the former Deputy Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz's pathbreaking speech on August 4, 2001 on "national security syndrome," this essay problematizes the increased security concerns of the TSK against the democratic priorities of the EU which Turkey aspires to join. Secondly, the essay analyzes the problems involved in Turkey's process of formulating its national security policy.*

*"The importance of our army is increasing because of those who are against the republic, democracy and secularism."<sup>1</sup>*

**T**urkey's former Deputy Prime Minister, Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi-ANAP), a junior partner in the three-party coalition government between 1999- 2002, made a speech to his party's convention on August 4, 2001 which sent shock waves right across the political divide. In it, he argued that Turkish politics was afflicted by a 'national security syndrome' which, so he claimed, only served to frustrate the reforms necessary to democratize and integrate the Turkish political system into the European Union (EU).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he urged the public and political fora to question the concept of national security. It seems, however, that his primary agenda was to imply that the language of national security was being used as a tool to legitimize the need for a military role in civilian affairs. More specifically, it

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1. General STSKf's statement reported in the press, "Siyasette Mesajlar" [Messages in Politics], *Milliyet*, Jan. 10, 1999.

2. "Ulusal Güvenlik Tartisilmali [National Security Should Be Debated], *Radikal*, August 5, 2001.

was being utilized by the military establishment and its supporters to convince themselves of the need to prioritize the indivisible and secular character of the regime as more important than the need for democratic reform. On the other hand, the European Union (EU) had prescribed a package of political reforms that must be fulfilled to start accession negotiations by the end of 2002 to qualify Turkey for full membership of the Union. The enhanced importance of the national security concept conflicted with the underlying implications of the EU's democratic standards regarding civil-military relations.

The effect of Mesut Yılmaz's speech on the military was chilling: the military hierarchy -represented by the General Staff—released a four-page document lashing out at Yılmaz.<sup>3</sup> It is ironical that the debate that followed was not about the “substance” of the national security syndrome. Nor was Yılmaz's speech expected to change drastically the way national security threats and policies were defined and formulated. What little debate that it did spark was more concerned with the way the speech represented a departure from the previously near-total absence of any empirical and theory-based problematisation of the topic. The importance of the speech quite clearly lay in its being the first of its kind. In that sense, the clamor that followed represents the high start-up costs of a fundamental attitudinal shift by the political class on a sacrosanct topic.

This article will seek to open the Pandora's box of national security by way of Yılmaz's August 4 speech. As such, it will address three underlying issues, in three parts. The first part is centered on the threshold shift in the political autonomy of the Turkish military, particularly since its last explicit intervention into politics on February 28, 1997. The main instrument effecting that change has been a new national security discourse fuelled by the perceived need to protect the republic against Kurdish separatism and Islamic extremism. There are three areas of sub-focus in the first part: the first is on connecting the reconceptualisation of national security by the military establishment with the domestic and global changes in the 1990s. The second subfocus offers an analysis of the significance of the military's control and oversight of “public policy” which has been made possible by blurring the distinctions between national security and politics. The third subfocus of the first part examines the importance of the agency question: who defines the security threat and who formulates responses to them. This question is crucially relevant for the power distribution between civil and military equation. In the second part, the article addresses the problems and challenges posed by the dominance of the security-first outlook in the public sphere in the 1990s in terms of the EU's political conditions for Turkish entry. In a final postscript, the article examines and analyzes the significance of the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Ak Parti - AKP*), a party with Islamic roots, for national security and civil- military relations after the November 3, 2002 general elections. Political Islam as the “supreme target” of securitization policies since 1997 had become a power contender by 2002, and this provides a fascinating study in terms of its relations with the ideological and structural hegemony of Turkey's military-led secu-

3. *Hurriyet*, August 8, 2001.

lar establishment. An important question in this regard is whether the AKP, government fortified by its strong showings at the polls, can restructure the political context to reshape the terms of the debate on national security in such a way as to maximize the chances for civilian participation and control. Or, will the centrality of the historic antagonism between the ideas and interests of the sectors the AKP is presumed to represent and the security community of Turkey enhance the AKP's importance for the system in a negative sense to a level far greater than mere numbers and figures would suggest? In short, the third part seeks to explore the critical trends, dynamics, and contradictions at work in the first three months of the AKP government between November 2002 and February 2003. Overall, however, this analysis endeavors to provide an understanding of what motivated former Deputy Prime Minister Yilmaz [Yilmaz at the time was also responsible for Turkey-EU relations] to critique Turkey's national security understanding for impeding democratization, constraining liberties and impairing civilian authority.

### *THE TSK AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY DISCOURSE IN THE 1990S*

The clout and position of the Turkish military rose sharply in the aftermath of its last intervention on February 28, 1997. On that occasion, the military dominated National Security Council (*Milli Guvenlik Kurulu* - hereafter MGK) issued the elected coalition government of the day an 18-point list of measures designed to clamp down on "reactionary Islam" (*irtica* in Turkish). That effectively forced the then Prime Minister, Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the pro-Islamic Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* - RP), which led a coalition with Tansu Ciller's True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi* - DYP), to resign.

The enlarged profile of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) cannot be explained solely by the historical-cultural role of the Turkish military as the ultimate guardian of the republic. The acknowledged source of the TSK's custodial role is the culture of the army and the existence of a society which legitimizes a dominant political role for the TSK.<sup>4</sup> The foundation of the political autonomy of the TSK is its defense of the official ideology of Kemalism, as established by the Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Official ideology holds that the inviolable principle of the republic is secularism, which by definition involves the upholding of a modern lifestyle and Westernizing discourse. The military's guardian role, in turn, has informed a political culture that mythologizes and sanctifies a benign political role for the armed forces.

Historical idiosyncrasies, the erosion of the legitimacy of democratic institutions and the civilian sphere, and the Turkish military's increasing importance in the regional security concerns of the Western alliance do not sufficiently explain the enhanced strategic position and the overtly politicized discourse of the armed forces

4. For an excellent analysis of the historical-cultural social context which shaped and was also influenced by the present profile of the TSK see Gareth Jenkins, "Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics," *Adelphi Paper*, No. 337 (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001), pp.9-20.

since 1997. The TSK's increased political activism and autonomy is currently connected with its redefinition of national security from external to internal threats. The Ministry of National Defense's (MND) White Papers for 1998 and 2000 specify the nature and sources of the threats to internal security as "threats to Turkey's unitary state quality" and to "the principle of secularism guaranteed in Articles 2 and 4 of the Constitution."<sup>5</sup> While the importance attached to the unitary state is said to be the natural outcome of the common culture of Turkey,<sup>6</sup> secularism is defined as the independence of the state from religious rules<sup>7</sup> and claimed to be the "issue of great significance in terms of our internal security."<sup>8</sup> It is clear that in the post-Cold War situation, the Kurdish issue and the growth of political Islam bear a large responsibility for the security-based policy line now being upheld.

The dependence of the national security system on public policy has also manifested itself in the dramatic change in the level of military involvement in politics. Since the last overt intervention in 1997, the TSK has been engaged in politics at the micro level as well as through its traditional way of being involved at the macro level through constitutional structures. The TSK, since then, has made and removed governments, issued public demands and warnings to civilians, engineered the transfer to a new premiership, structured new bills through its own research units and departments, and impinged on the day-to-day operations of elected governments. All in all, it seems that like its Latin America counterparts, national security-oriented policy-making in Turkey has served to usher in "strong democracy" rather than a liberal one.<sup>9</sup>

That being said, Turkish security concerns in the 1990's also included external threats: some countries such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, and to a lesser extent Russia were considered as holding a hostile stance towards Turkey. To ensure national security against those countries and the determination and will to resist and repel every kind of harassment likely to be posed to Turkey,<sup>10</sup> the national security system is said to be kept ready and capable. When these perceptions of internal and external threats are combined together, it seems that, contrary to the global trend, the end of the Cold War did not lead to softer security perceptions and a less securitized domestic agenda in Turkey.

Anti-military sentiment in Turkey has always been limited to a very small group consisting of a handful of a western-influenced group of intellectuals and human rights advocates. The factor primarily responsible for the popular perception of the military as the single most important guarantee against religious rule and political

5. *White Paper-Defense 1998* (Ankara: Ministry of National Defense, 1998), p.14.

6. *White Paper*, 1998, p.14.

7. This definition is made indirectly by making reference to Article No. 24 of the Constitution which reads "No one can exploit or misuse religion ... with the aim of making the basic social, economic, political or legal order of the state dependent on religious rules..." *White Paper*, p. 14.

8. *White Paper*, 1998, p.14.

9. Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 53.

10. Stepan, p. 13.

chaos is the fact that Turkey's male population has been extensively socialized into an unconditional support for the military values through compulsory military service. However, in accounting for the unprecedented political muscle of the armed forces since 1997, one must not lose sight of the new power strategy developed by the military with regard to the Turkish society. It is also correct to say that loss of public confidence in civilian governments has played a significant part in bolstering the already substantial level of approval and trust in the military. However, it is not clear if that reflects support for the military's political involvement. During the 1990s, the secret behind the military's strength lay not just in its traditionally control oriented discourse but also in the inroads the TSK has made on the fabric of Turkish society. In this regard, the military's agenda has been supported by a media that, whilst formally independent and pluralistic in structure, has purveyed a monistic nationalistic image.

### *NATIONAL SECURITY VIS-À-VIS THE GLOBAL TRENDS*

How does the Turkish example conform to or diverge from the global trends on security and civil-military relations? Clearly the end of the Cold War brought about a fundamental change in security agendas. Whereas security during the Cold War was exclusively defined in "hard" military terms, now security includes "soft" concerns such as economic and social issues, regime type, civil disorder, terrorism, communal conflict along ethnic and religious lines, proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, wars of secession, and environmental disasters.

The TSK seems to follow the global developments insofar as it has become increasingly preoccupied with responding to a range of soft security concerns. That the TSK fought a 15-year war in the southeast against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (henceforth PKK), also conforms to the global trend whereby intra-state wars have replaced inter-state wars as the main sources of insecurity. According to Mary Kaldor, these 'new wars' differ from traditional wars in three ways: they are about identity politics, that is, the exclusive claim to power on the basis of identities defined by memory, history as well as diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the methods of fighting have changed: full-scale battle is avoided, violence is directed against civilians, and the guerrilla strategies of the Cold War era have been revived. But while the former strategies of the Cold War aimed at capturing hearts and minds, the new warfare aims at sowing fear and hatred.<sup>12</sup> Conspicuous activities, population displacement, and home burning are all part of this strategy. Moreover these new wars have their own informal war economy which supports political and economic vested interests through plunder and black market activities.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond that point, however, the Turkish case departs from the global trend. The supposed Kurdish and Islamic threats are about problems of political inclusion/

11. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

12. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 7-8.

13. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, pp. 9-10.

integration under late modern conditions. The challenge they pose has raised the issue of how to combine security concerns with political concerns. But as civil-military relations are heavily skewed towards the military, the tendency has been for the military, unchecked by parliament, to spread its authority over major areas of national politics. In its harsh response to the then Deputy Prime Minister's claim that the national security concept was "too broad and inclusive,"<sup>14</sup> the General Staff simply replied by confirming that "national security is a concept which encompasses threat/risk perception and social, economic and military parameters." Turkey's Kurdish question is intertwined with socio-economic backwardness of the southeast region. However, contrary to the global trends, the Turkish military's search for a wider reading of the idea of security remains fixated on that conventional understanding of the problem. Regional imbalances theory enables the General Staff to uncouple the Kurdish problem from Turkey's democratic deficit, while directly connecting it with socio-economic underdevelopment.

The second major difference between the way the post-Cold War discourse on security and defence has been played out in the West and Turkey, is that in the former case the security doctrine is rarely applied to internal security.<sup>15</sup> This is mainly because military doctrine in Western democracies recognizes that national security is not an area that should be monopolized by military considerations. Italy, Spain, and Great Britain have also confronted separatist movements using terrorist methods. But those countries have managed their internal security threats "without the systematic use of torture and disappearances."<sup>16</sup> The best guarantee against the danger of military subordinating other national objectives to national security is the tradition in the West of maintaining a clear distinction between military and police roles, using the latter to respond to internal threats while restricting the role of the military to external defence. It follows that the rationale of the Western militaries requires that covert intelligence operations be also carried out under civilian jurisdiction. In Turkey, however, monitoring and managing PKK terrorism and the activities of Islamic groups in society have been turned into a "natural" function of the TSK.

In the post-Cold War security regime of Ankara, the military's entanglement with non-military/political functions works through its own expanded intelligence networks, political espionage and counterintelligence activities of its own.<sup>17</sup> A typical example of the TSK's fusing of civilian and military functions has been the creation of Western Study Group (*Bati Calisma Grubu* — henceforth BCG). That group includes

14. *Radikal*, August 9, 2001.

15. J. Samuel Finch, *The Armed Forces and Democracy in Latin America*, (Baltimore and London: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 132.

16. Finch, p. 122.

17. In Turkey, in addition to the military's own intelligence operations units, the National Intelligence Agency (*Milli Istihbarat Teskilatı-MIT*) serves as the civilian-based intelligence center subject to prime-ministerial control. Despite its civilian nature, however, it has not been unusual for the director and key officials of the MIT to be recruited from amongst retired officers and generals. Although some civilians have also been appointed as the directors of the MIT, it is not correct to claim that elected officials and the parliament have established effective control over its policies and operations, supposedly on account of the sensitive nature of their operations.

officers from all the forces allocated the task of collecting information about the political orientations of institutions and public figures. Subsequently, the Prime Ministerial Monitoring Council (*Basbakanlik Takip Kurulu*) was instituted to replace BCG. In its March 2001 meeting, the MGK (NSC) agreed, on the basis of a report prepared and submitted to it by the BCG, that the struggle against Islamic reactionism should be stepped up.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that BCG was set up out of the realisation that because the National Intelligence Agency (*Milli Istihbarat Teskilati*-MIT) was responsible to the Prime Minister and police intelligence to the Minister of the Interior (in turn answerable to the Prime Minister), intelligence reporting on extreme Islamic activities was bound to be tempered by the more permissive attitude of the civilians. Therefore, the General Staff felt that it would be safer to set up BCG as its own intelligence department vis-a-vis Islamic activity.<sup>19</sup> As such, the fact that neither the MGK nor the Prime Minister was informed about its establishment was regarded as contrary to the law by Meral Aksener, the then Minister of the Interior.<sup>20</sup>

### SECURITY, PUBLIC POLICY AND PUBLIC LIFE

The most radical implication of the post-Cold War understanding of security in Latin America, Turkey, and other similar contexts is that it is conceived of as synonymous with public policy, thus granting the military a free entry into policy making. This is made possible by letting the national security concept influence codification of laws pertaining to internal security, anti-terrorism, and maintenance of public order, criminalizing certain political activities, constraining public debate and expanding military jurisdiction over civilians. It is the translation of national security into laws, decrees, and regulations that, in fact, gives the Turkish military a wide latitude in policy making and law enforcement.

Moreover, the security-first outlook of the military has impinged on the National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) of March 19, 2001, the October 3, 2001 constitutional amendments and on the subsequent three rounds of legislative reform packages passed in the parliament in 2002 to expand fundamental rights and freedoms and to bring Turkey in line with the EU membership requirements (known technically as the *acquis*). The amendments basically fall into three areas: freedom of expression and other basic rights, broadcasting in Kurdish, and capital punishment. The third package of reforms that passed on August 3, 2002 went further than the others in easing restrictions and bans in all these areas, although the military, the ultranationalist Nationalist Action Party, and some deputies from Turkey's basically conservative center-right and pro-Islamic parties are known to dissent. The decisive voice has

18. Murat Gürgeç, "BTG: İrtica Bitmedi" ["Religious Reactionism Is Not Over"], *Radikal*, March 31, 2001.

19. Güven Erkaya, Taner Baytok, *Bir Asker Bir Diplomat [One Officer One Diplomat]* (Istanbul: Dogan Kitapçılık, 2001), pp.249-250.

20. "Meral Aksener 28 Subat ve BCG'yi Anlatıyor" in *28 Subat-Belgeler* ["Meral Aksener Explains the February 28 process" in February 28 Documents] (no authorship, Istanbul: Pinar Yayinlari, 200), p. 497.



been the MGK as the “supremo” of Turkish politics. The fact of the matter is that the MGK and the General Staff have given the green light to the amendments on condition that integration with Europe will not interfere with the military high-command’s traditional involvement in law and order, internal enemies, and foreign policy. Nor does the TSK associate democracy packages with the elimination of its political autonomy, although it expresses some awareness of the importance of the democracy-centered security architecture in post-Cold War Europe. In the August 2001 meeting of the MGK, where the constitutional amendments were on its agenda, the MGK meeting ended up with a resolution containing a warning that the amendments should be “matured,” meaning that the proposed amendments should be further amended and refined in line with the objections of the MGK.

The “State of Emergency,” “State Security Courts,” and “Article 312” of the Penal Code have been the critical agents in consolidating the primacy of national security over democracy in the last decade. Faced with massive terrorism in the southeast, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency in some provinces of the region in 1987 lasting until the summer of 2002, when the state of emergency was lifted in all but two provinces. Clearly, one of the chief reasons for Turkey’s increasing difficulties with the EU in the 1990s has been the human rights violations incurred by the security forces within the perimeters of the areas under the state of emergency. The regional governor, appointed for coordinating the state of emergency, exercises quasi-martial law powers, including restrictions on the press and removal from the area of persons who are thought to be detrimental to public order. Indeed, the Accession Partnership Document stipulated lifting all the remaining states of emergency in the southeast as part of harmonizing Turkish politics with the practice of the EU states.

The system of State Security Courts comprises the main vehicles for broadening the scope of military jurisdiction so as to try “crimes against the state” and also all other breaches of the Anti-Terror Law. Established in 1982, although taking its first cases in 1984, the State Security Courts have been civilianized since June 1999 after the European Court of Human Rights passed a verdict in 1998 that its composition — one military judge among two civilian judges—was against the European conventions. To prevent criticism on the trial of Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK leader, the military judge sitting on the bench was removed and replaced with a civilian one, although the functional and operational framework of the court has remained intact. The EU Commission’s Progress Reports have repeatedly specified that the powers and responsibilities, and the proceedings of these courts must be brought further in line with the EU standards. The first round of the democratization reforms passed in parliament on February 6, 2002 only dealt with this issue procedurally, by reducing the length of the period of custody for crimes tried in the State Security Courts.

Prosecutors in Turkey use another sword of Damocles, Article 312 of the Criminal Code for charges of inciting the public to racial or ethnic hostility. Once again, it has been mainly used to jail many of Turkey’s writers, publishers, intellectuals, and human rights activists for suggesting different ways of putting an end to the armed conflict in the southeast. The prevailing conviction of the top brass on retain-

ing the Article 312 is so strong that attempts to change it can even be considered ‘a challenge to the existing regime.’<sup>21</sup> Indeed, 312 seems to epitomize the crystallisation of an alarmist position on the part of the top brass with regard to Turkey’s democratization debate. The high command harbours serious concerns about the destructive potential of any political relaxation of freedoms, because of the need to protect the territorial integrity and ensure the removal of Islam from the public sphere.

Mesut Yilmaz warned in his speech that Turkey’s national security concept has run into deep problems for its narrow understanding of democracy and freedom of expression. As such, both the EU’s and Yilmaz’s concerns hinge on Article 312 of the Criminal Code. According to Yilmaz, if Turkey wants to join the EU, or even start negotiations for membership, there is one immediate step it needs to take: lift the obstacles to freedom of thought and expression.<sup>22</sup> The history of Article 312 according to a leading columnist is the story of everything else in Turkey: “uncourageous governments and security forces that would like this country to be ruled by the largest number and broadest possible prohibitions ... that are still afraid to introduce Western measures or bring Turkey’s pre-1980 situation back by amending 312.”<sup>23</sup>

### *THE CRITICAL QUESTION: WHO DECIDES ON WHAT COUNTS AS A SECURITY THREAT AND WHAT THE RESPONSE SHOULD BE?*

The national security concept in Turkey is formally called the “National Military Defense Concept” and is contained in National Security Policy Documents (henceforth NSPD). These documents are prepared by the Secretariat of the MGK and turn into government policy after being accepted by the MGK without any input from Parliament either at the debating or ratification stages. The formulation of the concept, publication of the document, and the security policies that follow are then confined to the MGK secretariat which coordinates with the General Staff and foreign ministry during the preparation stage. Together with some provisions of Act 2945 on the National Security Council and the National Security Council General Secretariat (1983), this framework has assigned broad powers to the MGK ‘not just in the defence of Turkey’s territory and its political and economic interests, but also the preservation of its Kemalist legacy.’<sup>24</sup>

The MGK was created in 1961. Reflecting the more liberal outlook of the post-coup Constitution of 1961, the number of the MGK’s civilian members exceeded those of the senior commanders. With the 1973 amendments, in the aftermath of the 1971 intervention-by-memorandum, the primary function of the MGK extended to making policy recommendations to the government. Finally, according to Article 118

21. Opinion expressed by deceased Admiral Güven Erkaya, the powerful commander of the Sea Forces at the time of the February 28, 1997 coup-by-briefing. See Erkaya, *Bir Asker Bir Diplomat*, p.281.

22. TV interview with Mesut Yilmaz on NTV, August 9, 2001.

23. Ismet Berkan, “312 ve Mesut Yilmaz” [“312 and Mesut Yilmaz”] *Radikal*, August 13, 2001.

24. Jenkins, “Context and Circumstance,” p. 46.

of the post-coup Constitution of 1982, its position was enhanced to one of submitting to the Council of Ministers its views on taking decisions and ensuring necessary coordination with regard to the formulation, establishment, and implementation of the national security policy. In reality, the military has often used the MGK as a platform for putting forward its own political agenda. The Council of Ministers is required to give priority consideration to the decisions of the MGK.<sup>25</sup> The October 2001 amendments to the constitution increased the number of civilians in the MGK and reduced the power of its decisions to that of simple recommendation. In practice, that has not changed the essential power imbalance between the civilian and military wings of the MGK as this is effectively a function of a broader system of sustenance of the military's influence, rather than a numerical disparity. The MGK resolutions are implemented to the letter by the government of the day. The reality was best expressed by now deceased Admiral Guven Erkaya in 1997: "governments are free to implement these recommendations. Responsibility belongs to the government." This responsibility is then couched in terms of the following caveat: "now if you, as the prime minister and the government do not take these precautions and therefore cause problems in the country, this means you are the one responsible for it. You may not implement the decisions, but then you must be ready to pay the price. People will ask for it."<sup>26</sup> More importantly, the incumbent Secretary General of the MGK General Cumhur Asparuk, recently said that the function of the MGK is to 'establish the national security policy with regard to providing national security and reaching national targets which include a contemporary understanding of the state.'<sup>27</sup>

The last NSPD document was published on April 29, 1997, with a radical change in its stated concerns. While the previous NSPD, formulated on November 18, 1992 had singled out Kurdish terrorist acts as the foremost security threat to the state, the 1997 document identified, in order of priority, Islamic activism and Kurdish separatism as the paramount security threats. After the capture, arrest, and trial and conviction of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK, this perspective has continued to gain currency.

Turkish press reports revealed that Mesut Yilmaz's criticism of the ongoing security policies was spurred on by the "actors" and "formulation process" of the NSPDs and lack of any public discussion on them. When asked in a television interview as to why he did not raise his objections in the MGK, Yilmaz responded by saying that if he had obtained any results, he would not have brought it to the party convention.<sup>28</sup> This raises the issue of transparency and the adequacy of the debate in drawing up the objectives, scope, and instruments of national security policy even in

25. The wording of Article 118 does not, however, absolve the Council of Ministers—four members of which are represented in the MGK in addition to the five high-echelon armed forces commanders, the President and the Prime Minister—of the function of deliberating on these policy recommendations before and after they are discussed in the MGK. Indeed, Article 117 of the Constitution authorises the Council of Ministers as the body responsible for formulating national security policies and for the preparation of the armed forces for the defense of the country.

26. Guven Erkaya, Taner Baytok, *Soylesi-Bir Asker Bir Diplomat*, p. 269.

27. "Ordudan Ince Message"["Subtle Message from the Military"], *Radikal*, August 23, 2001.

28. TV interview with Mesut Yılmaz on NTV, August 9, 2001.

the MGK.

As such, Mesut Yilmaz's critique simultaneously addresses the problem of reconciling the military culture's imperative for secrecy with the democratic imperative of transparency. The military side to the debate expressed its position with regard to the issue immediately: "matters related to national security and national security concept should be discussed in more serious platforms devoid of daily political interests."<sup>29</sup> It is true that national security policies are exempted from popular control and knowledge even in modern liberal democracies. But, the TSK's concern to limit any discussion of national security to the MGK misses the point that arises when in the MGK there is either no, or too little, debate on national security, simply because the military view prevails. In other words, lack of transparency, debate, and refinement of ideas in the MGK meetings is probably born out of the significantly unequal "power" relations between the military and the civilian sides of the MGK. The civilian component of that forum is more reticent than the military component not because of any physically imposed limits on their participation but probably due to self-imposed restraint. The internal urge not to arouse the antagonism of the military has always been a more powerful brake than anything else. Moreover, the military wing meets in advance of the monthly scheduled meetings to discuss and "arrive at a common decision" on the items of the agenda.<sup>30</sup> This process of decision-making further puts the civilians, often coalition partners belonging to diverse political persuasions, at a disadvantage.

### *THE EU AND THE SECURITY MISSION OF THE TSK*

The TSK's prominence in public policy is one critical factor negatively affecting Turkey's full inclusion into the EU. After gaining candidate country status at the December 1999 Helsinki summit, Turkey was asked to comply with the membership requirements set by the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993. That included ensuring the stability of institutions, guaranteeing complete freedom of expression, human rights, respect and protection for minorities and an efficient market economy. The "political criteria" inscribed in the EU's Accession Partnership Document in 2000, reflected the spirit of Copenhagen Criteria, albeit in a more detailed manner. Those criteria range from the establishment of the freedom of expression and association to removing any legal provisions on the use of one's mother tongue while broadcasting, reinforcing the need to abolish torture, arbitrary detention, other violations of human rights, maintaining a de facto moratorium on capital punishment, and finding a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem.<sup>31</sup>

By and large, the government, under pressure by the military, cannot bring itself

29. "Military to Yilmaz: Do not Exploit National Security," *Turkish Daily News*, August 11, 2001.

30. See Erkaya, *Bir Asker Bir Diplomat*, pp.270-271. The same procedure is confirmed by retired Admiral Salim Dervisoglu in Hulki Cevizoglu, *Generalden 28 Subat Itirafı: Postmodern Darbe [Confession From the General on 28 February: Postmodern Coup]* (Ankara: Ceviz Kabuđu Yayınları, 2001), pp. 74-75.

31. *Turkey: 2000 Accession Partnership, Annex, 7.*

to meet these demands fully. To the demand that the preponderant role of the MGK and the TSK, in general, in internal security should be reduced and civilian control over the military be established, the hierarchy is known to respond by emphasizing the unique requirements of the Turkish system.<sup>32</sup> Faced with the demand in the Accession Partnership Document to consider allowing broadcasting and education in Kurdish, Brigadiere General Halil Simsek, Commander of the Armed Forces Academy, expressed the top brass's view when he said that this document aims at "breaking up our country in the name of 'cultural rights,' 'broadcasting in mother tongue,' and 'educational rights.'" <sup>33</sup> Currently, the public statements of the General Staff, individual commanders, and the general secretariat of the MGK reveal the thesis that such compromises are too high a price to pay for being included in a group which would deprive Turkey of decision-making autonomy and which often displays a negative bias towards Turkey.<sup>34</sup> The tenor of their argument is that easing the freedom of expression should be made on the condition that it will not inflame Kurdish claims and revive political Islam. The September 11, 2001 attacks have also introduced a conservative bias in the general Staff's position regarding the fulfilment of the Copenhagen Criteria. General Tuncer Kilinc, Secretary General of the MGK, recently told an audience at the Ankara War Academy that "the EU will never accept Turkey... Thus, Turkey now needs new allies, and it would be useful if she engages in a search that would include Russia and Iran."<sup>35</sup> When the amendments to Article 312 of the Penal Code and Article 14 of the Constitution, which prohibits thought crimes, were on the agenda, General Huseyin Kivrikoglu, the former Chief of General Staff stated that the constitutions of a number of EU countries, including Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Sweden and Spain, had similar provisions.<sup>36</sup>

In the Copenhagen Summit of December 13, 2002, the EU leaders refused to commit themselves to setting a date to start accession talks with Turkey, but instead offered December 2004 as the review date for setting a date to start full membership negotiations. Despite this setback, Prime Minister Gul reiterated his government's determination to continue with the reforms, not only to join the EU but also because it was in the interests of the country. Indeed, the new government pushed for the adoption of a series of democratic and human rights reforms to try to meet the Copenhagen

32. *Turkish Daily News*, November 25, 1999.

33. "Brigadier General Simsek: Accession Partnership Document Divides Us," *NTVMSNBC News*, internet, Jan. 11, 2001.

34. See the speech by General Nahit Senogul, the Commander of War Academies, "*Senogul: Türkiye'yi AB'de İstemeyenler Var*" ["There are Those Who Do Not Want Turkey in the EU"], *NTVMSNBC News*, internet, January 11, 2001. For more empirical sources on the topic see Jenkins, "Context and Circumstance," pp. 57-82.

35. Jon Gorvett, "Turkish Military Fires Warning Shot over EU Membership," *The Middle East*, No. 323 (May 2002), p. 33.

36. Murat Yetkin, "*Kivrikoglundan Surpriz Oneri: 14. Maddeyi Avrupa Anayasalarından Alalım*" ["Surprise Proposal by Kivrikoglu: Let's Borrow Article 14 From European Constitutions"], *Radikal*, August 23, 2001; Murat Yetkin, "*Askerden İkinci Surpiriz: 312 de AB Standardi Gelsin*" ["Second Surprise by the Military: the EU Standards Should Come for 312"], *Radikal*, August 24, 2001.

Criteria. In his speech in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly on January 27, 2003, Prime Minister Gul emphasized the "pace of reforms"<sup>37</sup> contrasting them to the growing tendency in some parts of the world to restrict fundamental rights and freedoms due to security concerns. He indicated the significance of democratic reforms for cutting back security oriented restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms.

It may well be that the military establishment does not believe it has moved away from the modernizing rationale of the republic even though its penchant for narrowing the political sphere has produced an ever-growing void between Europe and Turkey. That drift may not even be a matter of conscious consideration, but rather the perpetuation of the existing paradigm. However, the "political criteria" of the Accession Partnership Document demand a deeper paradigmatic shift, an alteration in the fundamental rules of the game rather than simply formal institutional changes.

However, the issue of EU integration has given rise to some positive developments as well. With the EU-Turkey negotiations gaining intensity and speed for the first time, the military's guardianship role can now be understood as creating a paradox for the democratic credentials of the regime. During the 1990s, Turkey's civil and bureaucratic cadres as well as the general public have been exposed to new perspectives on the meaning and importance of basic rights and freedoms, cultural rights, democratic control of armed forces and the rule of law. This, we can safely say, must have contributed to a reconsideration on the part of the public about the role of citizens and the other actors in the decision-making framework, and the country's position vis-à-vis the West. A new stage of political maturity, in turn, may be the harbinger of a sustained call for the entrenchment of democratic principles.

### *POSTSCRIPT: NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE AKP ERA: THE FIRST THREE MONTHS*

The election victory of the AKP in November 2002 with 34.2 percent of the total votes and 363 of the 550 seats in the National Assembly gave it a clear mandate to run the country and form the first non-coalition government in 15 years. The landslide election victory of the AKP raises vital questions about possible changes in the balance of power between civilians and the military, a balance which is underpinned by the existing paradigm of national security. As custodian of the secular political tradition, will the TSK's "janissary instinct"<sup>38</sup> resurrect itself with the support of the other elements of the secular establishment, public prosecutors, foreign ministry, the opposition party in the Parliament, the Republican People's Party, and the President of the Republic? Or, will the secular establishment stand aside this time 'despite the fact that

37. The address by Abdullah Gul, the Prime Minister of Turkey, to the 2003 Ordinary Session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, January 27, 2003. Press minutes.

38. Stephan O'Shea, "The Talk of Turkey," *London Review of Books*, (November 28, 2002), p. 35.

the AKP is a potential blasphemer at its altar of secularism?"<sup>39</sup>

It is widely thought that the AKP's rise to power is a product of the structural disintegration of dominant power relations in Turkey. The elections, in other words, made clear the rejection by vast sectors of the population of existing political framework and of political inertia. If this diagnosis is correct, then it offers the AKP government the chance to embark on its own "change"/reform mandate in order to focus on easing the daily life of ordinary people in an economy reeling from the effects of the gravest slump (February 2001) in the country's history, to prioritize democracy over security concerns, and to diminish, reduce or dismantle the influence of the traditional centers of power. This is not to deny that because the existing power balance between the security-military centers and the civilian sector greatly favors the former, it will be very difficult for the AKP leadership to integrate the military sector into the democratic process without causing a serious backlash from the latter.

The AKP strategy will gradually unfold itself, greatly depending on how the establishment reacts to the dramatic change in the political landscape after November 3, 2002. A close analysis of government and military interactions during the first three months of the AKP in power suggests that the General Staff feels that the AKP's electoral success reaffirms its conviction that if unchecked, political Islam can come to power and become a fundamental threat to the regime. Therefore, the military is following its time-tested strategy against the Islamist threat by attempting "to restrict the AKP's room for manoeuvre... to undermine Erdogan's (the leader of the party) credibility and to delay or even prevent him ever being appointed prime minister."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as the leader of the party, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was banned from holding public office for a past crime of inciting religious hatred in a poem, he was compelled to delegate the prime ministry to the vice-chairman of the party, Abdullah Gul. This situation itself became a source of two-headedness and confusion in the decision making process in the AKP. Moreover, in the two weeks following the elections, the AKP was served three warnings and reminders that the "February 28 process" continues.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, President Ahmet N. Sezer, a staunch believer in secularism, used his veto power to refuse to endorse some bills introduced by the AKP that he considered detrimental to the secular tradition, such as lifting the ban on Erdogan's leadership and refusing to approve some of the bureaucratic appointments of the government.<sup>42</sup>

The most important warning came after Abdullah Gul, the Prime Minister, registered his formal reservations when signing the Supreme Military Court's decision on the expulsion of 7 officers accused of Islamist orientations, complaining about the

39. O'Shea, "The Talk of Turkey," p. 35.

40. "Turkey's Landmark Election-Erdogan's Prospects," *Strategic Comments*, Vol 29, No. 9 (2002); online edition://www.iiss.org/stratcomsub.php. Recep Tayyip Erdogan waned from public office for inciting religious hatred by publicly reciting a poem. This situation is partly responsible for the appearance of two-headedness, division and incoherence in the party.

41. A phrase coined after the last military intervention to indicate the military's plan to refashion Turkey's politics along secular lines by prioritizing political Islam as top national security threat.

42. "Sezerle AKP Sessiz Savasta," ["Sezer and the AKP in Silent War"], *Radikal*, January 31, 2003.

lack of an appeals process to a higher court. In response and in his first public attack on the AKP after the elections, General Hilmi Ozkok, the Chief of the General Staff, accused the new government of encouraging anti-secular activities.<sup>43</sup>

As part of its strategy to undermine the AKP government, the military hierarchy refrained from providing a firm support to the government in seeking parliamentary approval of the deployment of the US combat troops to use the Turkish territory to launch an attack on Iraq.<sup>44</sup> The public was given the impression that the AKP leadership cannot form speedy, effective and coherent sets of policies on whether or not to allow US troops to use its territory as a springboard for invading Iraq and that the TSK awaits the decision of the elected civilian authorities: "The Turkish General Staff can only respond to the US requests after examining the details of the political decision to be made by the Turkish government."<sup>45</sup> The Prime Minister, when accused by the General Staff of being hesitant, weak, and wobbly on the Iraqi crisis, responded quite vocally that "Turkey's Iraq policy is shaped by consensus in the MGK."<sup>46</sup> Pressed very hard by the USA, the situation was finally clarified in the MGK meeting of January 31, 2003 which came out with the recommendation that the government should seek parliamentary authorization to allow the US troops to upgrade several of its bases and ports in Turkey in preparation for war, an authorization that came on February 6, 2003. At the time of this writing, Turkish parliament had rejected an earlier proposal on March 1, 2003 on the deployment of American ground troops from Turkish soil. However, it opened its air corridor to the US airplanes bound for Iraq to transport troops and take supplies on March 20, 2003 soon after the war started, making it impossible for the USA to open a northern front that could shorten the war and perhaps reduce casualties.

### *THE AKP VIS-À-VIS THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT: INTERNATIONALISM AND REFORMISM*

Initial predictions on the AKP's future stance toward the secular establishment reflect some degree of pessimism regarding the capacity of the government "to encroach on foreign and which have traditionally been the preserves of the military and the foreign ministry."<sup>47</sup> However, it is not true to say that the AKP leadership has confined itself to simple inaction and passivity on sensitive issues and cases pertaining to national security, both on the domestic and international front. In stark contrast to its predecessors of the same ideological line which followed an intimidated and con-

43. Murat Gergen, "Asker Serhe Kizgin," [The TSK Is Angry with the Reservations], *Radikal*, Jan., 9, 2003.

44. The unwilling stance of the government on that issue is shared by the public at large, opposition parties in and outside the Parliament, the media, intellectuals, and even the top brass.

45. Lale Sariibrahimoglu, "General Hilmi Ozkok, the Chief of the General Staff," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, February 22, 2003, p. 32.

46. "Basbakan: Kararsiz Degiliz" ["The Prime Minister: We are Not Indecisive"], *Radikal*, January 12, 2003.

47. "Turkey's Landmark Election-Erdogan's Prospects," *Strategic Comments*, 2002.



ciliatory rather than a challenging discourse toward the expanded level of military prerogatives in the security arena, the AKP administration follows a discourse that is quite deliberate and decisive in trying to increase its leverage in the system. Yet, at the same time, it is cautious in not pushing the relations to a clashing point. In fact, the discourse on the civil-military relations in Turkey in the first three months of the AKP's administration, at least before the pressures of the Iraq war intensified, reveals an "intent" to shift the epicenter and referents of politics from the civil-military bureaucracy to the support by the society of the civilian government.

This intention, in turn, is underpinned by the belief that 'effective governance' is the key to creating power for the AKP in its attempt to lead the military out of internal political roles. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the party voiced this fundamental conviction when he analyzed the causes of the previous military interventions at the World Economic Forum in Davos: "...the TSK filled the vacuum left when the political authority was not strong enough. Now there is a very powerful party and government."<sup>48</sup> This diagnosis, by attributing the military's predominance in politics and security to civilian weakness, serves to affirm the military's argument to justify its internal role and lacks a systemic understanding of this role. In the same meeting, however, Tayyip Erdogan clarified his understanding of the balance of power in a healthy democracy: "(civilian) politics has supremacy. The military is one of the institutions that is subordinate to it."<sup>49</sup> When one combines various statements by the party officials -some analytical some not-with the AKP's intent and actions during its first three months in power, it becomes clear that the AKP administration anticipates that the power and dynamism of a problem-solving administration are the best possible deterrent against undue military prerogatives.

For the new government, the adoption of an "internationalist" posture in foreign policy and a "reformist" one internally seem to provide the two strategies by which to secure effective governance. The AKP connects its ideological assault against the old paradigm and its defenders with a "Europeanist" project promoting the country's integration with the EU and negotiations for a settlement of the Cyprus issue on the basis of the UN Secretary General's plan. It is hoped that the magnitude of democratic changes the EU will evoke in the Turkish political process will reduce the military's role and its significance in the system. In other words, "the AKP's willingness to settle the Cyprus issue is linked to its desire to make Turkey an EU member, which in turn is rooted in three factors. First, the AKP hopes that EU membership will bolster Turkey's democracy, which also means its own chance to gain and hold onto office. Secondly, joining the EU would provide Turkey with the means to ensure economic growth and political stability. Last but not least, the AKP believes that getting into the EU will provide its conservative voter base with increased religious and personal freedoms."<sup>50</sup>

48. "Siyasetteki Boslugu Bazen Ordu Doldurdu,"[The Vacuum in Politics Is Sometimes Filled by the Military], *Hurriyet*, January 25, 2003.

49. "Siyasetteki Boslugu Bazen Ordu Doldurdu," January 25, 2003.

50. Soner Cagaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," *Meria* Vol. 6, No. 4 (December 2002); online edition ://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2002/issue 4/jv6n4a6.html.

In the question-answer session following his address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on January 27, 2003, Abdullah Gul, in answer to an explicit question on what his administration intends to do about military prerogatives, replied, "...we are reformists, so our aim is to upgrade Turkish democracy so that it meets the standards of the Council of Europe. We have therefore amended the Constitution and changed the nature of the nation's executive council.<sup>51</sup> That is, of course, a process that I think will continue."<sup>52</sup>

In sum, the new government can be said to believe that its ability to minimize the risks posed by challenging the secular establishment rests on two things: its success in shifting the referents of the public debate to politics by creating a relatively positive political and economic situation, and its ability to instrumentalize the EU's democratic requirements for entry to that end.

## CONCLUSION

What can be said by way of conclusion? As the current imbalance of civil-military relations in Turkey shows, the crucial issue remains at bottom a question of who defines the security threats, sets acceptable risks, and determines appropriate responses to them. Security now is seen more as a question of internal stability challenged by the implosion of religious and nationalist upsurge underpinned by identity politics rather than a hard military matter. This view is strengthened by the AKP's electoral victory. As security issues force a series of political questions about power, citizenship, methods of integration, state-society relations, democracy, and governance, the agency question, i.e., who will address these issues within a given regime, gains central importance. The Western tradition, in this regard, is definitely on the side of the constitutionally elected authorities: "the military can describe in some detail the nature of the threat posed by a particular enemy, but only the civilians can decide whether to feel threatened and if so how or even whether to respond. The military quantifies the risk, the civilians judge it ... in other words, civilians have a right to be wrong."<sup>53</sup> The Turkish tradition, as we have seen, differs diametrically from this. Mesut Yilmaz echoed the newly developing sensitivity in some civilian circles about the centrality of the issue of who decides about the national security, in terms of the impact on the Turkish accession to Europe: "national security is not an issue that should be left only to the military...in democracies national security is the job of the politicians."<sup>54</sup>

51. by "executive council," he is referring to the MGK. The AKP government passed the bill harmonizing the law on National Security Council in accordance with a key amendment to the constitution in October 2001 which increased the number of civilian members and made the council's decisions recommendational only.

52. "The address by Abdullah Gul, the Prime Minister of Turkey, to the 2003 Ordinary Session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, January 27, 2003. Press minutes.

53. Peter Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1996), p. 154.

54. TV interview with Mesut Yilmaz on *Kanal D*, August 9, 2001.