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The Middle East Journal, Volume 63, Number 4, 2009, pp. 581-596 (Article)

Published by Middle East Institute

DOI: [10.1353/mej.0.0092](https://doi.org/10.1353/mej.0.0092)



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A Paradigmatic Shift for the Turkish Generals and an End to the Coup Era in Turkey

Ersel Aydinli

Turkey has been undergoing major democratic transformations in recent years, but one issue remains in question: the role of the military. Have these democratic changes also included an irreversible, structural change for the Turkish military's political role? Are the Turks reconceptualizing their special bond with the armed forces and most importantly, is the military leadership ready to go along with this paradigm shift? This article first provides a typology of civil-military relations worldwide and identifies the main parameters of traditional Turkish civil-military relations as a system in which society maintains a direct, special bond with its military, keeping politics and politicians in a secondary position. It then suggests that this pattern is shifting into a more democratic one, in which society places its trust in politics, thus forcing the military into the secondary position. It then analyzes the discourse and policies of the last three Turkish Chiefs of Staff for evidence that the army is adapting into this paradigm shift. With the completion of this adaptation, Turkey may very well be leaving the coup era behind.

Arguably the most distinctive characteristic of Turkish civil-military relations has been the apparent anomaly that despite various explicit and implicit military interventions into politics and social life, Turkish society has consistently indicated the military as the country's most prestigious and trusted institution.¹ In part this loyalty may exist because Turkey has a conscript army. Others have posited that this was only normal since the military has built up the capacity and mastered strategies to manipulate its relationship with society.² The fact, however, that societal admiration of the army has not been significantly altered, even at times when the military's "manipulation resources" have been trimmed (particularly throughout the recent years of the EU Accession process³), begs an explanation, and implies that there are deeper issues contributing to Turkish society's bond with the army. One explanation is that Turkish societal mistrust

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1. "TESEV'e göre halk en çok orduya güveniyor" ["According to Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Public Trusts in Army Most"], *Hürriyet*, November 28, 1998; "En önemli sorun işsizlik" ["The Most Important Problem Is Unemployment"], *Hürriyet*, March 31, 2004; Taha Akyol, "En güvenilir kurum, ordu" ["The Most Accredited Institution is the Army"], *Milliyet*, January 19, 2005; "Orduya güvenmek" ["Trusting in the Army"], *Milliyet*, October 4, 2006.

2. Tanel Demirel, "Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri'nin Toplumsal Mesruiyeti Üzerine" ["On Societal Legitimacy of the Turkish Armed Forces"], *Toplum ve Bilim*, Summer 2002. See as well his work "Soldiers and Civilians: The Dilemma of Turkish Democracy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (January 2004), pp. 127-150.

3. Some examples of how the military exercised its power within the civilian realm and were limited by landmark transformations include the restructuring of the National Security Council and the removal of military personnel from civilian courts and the Higher Education Council.

of politics⁴ and fear of state collapse have created mutually constructed expectations in the society and army that, when things go wrong, the army will intervene and save the day. In other words, an ultimate guardianship role for the army appears to have been the essence of the relationship.⁵ Recent events in Turkish politics, however, seem to suggest that the nature of this relationship might be changing.

In parliamentary elections held in the summer of 2007, the pro-Islamist⁶ Adalet ve Kalkınma Party (AKP) government received the overwhelming support of Turkish voters, and restrengthened its majority position in the Parliament. It subsequently went on to elect a pro-Islamist to the Presidency, and even went so far as to change the Constitution, allowing headscarved women into university classrooms — an issue which has long symbolized the divide between Islamist politics and the secular establishment. Most politicians, from the nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) to the Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (DTP), and of course, the majority AKP, supported these changes, confident that society was overwhelmingly supportive as well. Indeed, while the army clearly opposed these moves, strong societal support seemed to provide them a convincing message not to intervene.⁷ The army does not appear interested in listening to more radical calls and provocations, but rather in closely watching and assessing where the majority of the public stands so as not to distance itself from them. The message they seem to be getting is one to not intervene in politics. The obvious question now arises: Is there a paradigmatic change underway in Turkish society's relationship with its military? Are the Turks reconceptualizing their special bond with the armed forces, from a more emotional, existential one, to a practical and professional one that is managed by the civilian political elite? And most importantly, is the military leadership showing signs of being ready to go along with this paradigm shift?

TURKISH CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Understanding the Turkish army is perhaps best begun by understanding what it is not. To do this, we should look at other armies, and at the various paradigms of civil-military relations within which they exist. At least four such paradigms can be identi-

4. Going back to the Ottoman understanding that it was the politicians who brought about the end of the Empire.

5. Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (1997), pp. 151-166.

6. This term is chosen in recognition of how the AKP has changed in recent years. The party may have come into power with the mobilizing force of a nucleus Islamist group, but in order to remain there and to keep as broad a base of support as possible, it has moved towards the center, while maintaining deep pro-Islamist sympathies.

7. A well-known journalist with links to the military admitted that despite being the "most trusted institution" in the country, the military does not want to garner the societal disapproval that comes with open interventions in civilian politics. See Metehan Demir, "Askerler CHP'ye çok kızgın" ["Soldiers Are Very Angry with the Republican People's Party"], *Radikal*, August 20, 2007. Former Chief of Staff Yasar Büyükanıt disagreed with this assessment that the military's moves might have ultimately pushed society towards the politicians, but admitted that this was only his opinion. See "Büyükanıt: Bildirinin seçim sonuçlarını etkilediğini sanmıyorum" ["Mr. Büyükanıt: I Do Not Think That the Declaration Affected the Election Results"], *Milliyet On-line News*, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/07/30/son/sonsiy25/asp>.

fied: the European, the former Soviet, the Latin American, and the American.

The European paradigm of civil-military relations is based on the complete separation, unquestioned subordination, and almost radical isolation of the armed forces from civilian politics.⁸ The foundations for such a perspective are based on European historical experience and the lived understanding that in the hands of radical politicians an army can be a perfect tool for militarism — and militarism is the mother of all kinds of evil. One needs look no further than the example of Hitler to understand from where this paradigm comes. Contrast this with the Soviet paradigm, in which the army constituted the muscles of a single party system. The party ‘owned’ the army — as it did everything else. There was therefore no separation of the two, but there was still a complete subordination of the army, in this case to the party.⁹

In what we can call the Latin American paradigm, the crux of the relationship is a mistrust of the armed forces itself. The army is basically viewed as a predatory institution, capable of intervening into civilian politics at any time, and once having intervened, likely to try to remain in power.¹⁰ There is therefore an understanding that armies should be kept completely away from politics, and that their loyalty to the civilian government has to be kept under guarantee at all costs.

Another perspective altogether, the American paradigm, is based on professionalism, in which civilian control is unquestioned, and the military is there to be consulted or used when deemed necessary.¹¹ The civilians’ control is great enough that they are the ones who determine this need. At times, the military’s experience, expertise, and vision can even be circumvented, ignored, or manipulated when it does not fit with the civilian politicians’ agendas — the obvious example of this being the start of the Iraqi

8. Hans Born, Marina Caparini, Karl Haltiner, and Jurgen Kuhlmann, eds., *Civil-Military Relations in Europe: Learning from Crisis and Institutional Change* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

9. Roman Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Roman Kolkowicz, “Toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist (Hegemonial) Systems,” in Roman Kolkowicz, *Soldiers, Peasants, Bureaucrats* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); Timothy Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority: The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Amos Perlmutter and William M. Leogrande, “The Party in Uniform: toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist Political Systems,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (December 1982), pp. 778-789.

10. Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, Yun-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien, eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); David Pion-Berlin, ed., *Civil-Military Relation in Latin America, New Analytical Perspectives* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, *The Politics of Anti-Politics: The Military in Latin America* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997); Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Paul Sigmund, “Approaches to the Study of the Military in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics*, No. 26 (1993), pp. 111-122.

11. At first glance, there might appear an overlap between the European and American paradigms, but there is a key difference in that the former is based on a strong, core anti-military sentiment. For more on the American paradigm see: Samuel Huntington, *Soldier and the State* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957); Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Military Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

campaign in 2003, in which the army's voice was not necessarily listened to by the civilians when it came to questions such as how many troops to send in.¹²

The Turkish army and the Turkish pattern of civil-military relations do not neatly fit into any of these paradigms. The nature of Turkish civil-military relations reflects the centuries-long historical experience of the Ottoman Empire (and its gradual decline), a traumatic War of Independence (1919-1923), a Cold War that was actually quite hot in Turkey, and an immense modernization project which was ultimately entrusted to the Turkish army itself. Turning back to the various international paradigms, we can say that, with the exception perhaps of the years 1938-1950, the Turkish army was never the army of a single party, and it was never the tool of radical politicians. It was also never truly a predatory army that sought long-term power, always having returned power promptly to the civilians after the various military interventions. On the other hand, it was never convinced that the level of democracy in Turkey and the quality of civilian politics was good enough to become completely subordinate to them.

What can we conclude then from the existence of these various paradigms? First, it is apparent that there are some expected universal democratic standards regarding the quality of civil-military relations in any nation, but these different paradigms also tell us that we are far from such a homogenous standard.¹³ Second, just as in any other country, the nature of Turkish civil-military relations reveals that it also has been mostly affected and shaped by local Turkish experience — its historical past, its relations within an anarchic region, and its ongoing experience with democratic practice. What then is the essence of Turkish society's experience with its army?

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS A LA TURCA

What appears to be the greatest determinant in the development of a Turkish style of civil-military relations is that it emerged during the break-up and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The first political faction of that time, Enver, Talat, and Cemal Pasha's Ittihat ve Terakki Party, brought about the death blow to the Empire by leading the Ottoman state into the disaster of World War I, and thus, as they were representatives of the political realm, politics became seen by both society and the elite as a risk-taking and potentially destructive force.¹⁴ The Sultanate, for all its faults, at least represented continuity and, therefore, greater stability. With the Sultanate removed, uneasiness with the political world meant that society's desire for a confidence-projecting, stable guardian needed a new object, and it eventually found one in the institution of the army.¹⁵

12. Marouf Hasian, Jr., "Dangerous Supplements, Inventive Dissent, and Military Critiques of the Bush Administration's Unitary Executive Theories," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2007), pp. 693-716. For a critique of US civil-military relations in light of the Iraqi war, see Michael C. Desch, "Bush and the Generals," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (2007), pp. 97-108.

13. Douglas L. Bland, "Patterns in Liberal Democratic Civil-Military Relations," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2001), pp. 525-540.

14. William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military* (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), p. 58.

15. Dankwart A. Rustow, "The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic," *World Politics*, Vol. 11 (1959), pp. 513-552 (519). Several groups and guerilla movements, known as Kuvay-i Milliye, emerged to resist the invasion, yet these groups lacked organization. Rustow argues that the army's and the former military officers' involvement as the organizing element of resistance was a direct outcome of an appeal by the Anatolian masses.

From the beginning of the 20th century the Turkish paradigm of civil-military relations became increasingly based on a convergence of the army filling the basic security needs of the society as well as a central role of guardianship and national continuity. Alongside such an “army in society” structure, civilian politicians — with the exception of the founders of the Republic with a military background, Atatürk and to some extent the country’s second President, İsmet İnönü — have maintained an image of being less trustworthy third party figures, who have had to please both society and the army to take a role as legitimate partners in the governance system. In short, Turkish society always has had a direct relationship with the army (which came to represent the “state”), and maintained a more fragile, secondary relationship with its politicians and politics (represented as the “government”). For most of Turkish society, the state took priority over the government.¹⁶

Throughout the Republican period, particularly during times of political crisis, Turkish society has rarely hesitated from turning to the army as its ultimate protector. In 1960, with the country shaken by its first experience with multi-party politics and with fears on the rise that politicians were becoming more totalitarian in their approach, the country’s democratically elected Prime Minister was ousted in a coup supported by mass demonstrations of an influential portion of the public, including academics, the bureaucratic elite, and student leaders. In 1980, with the country in a virtual civil war between leftist pro-Communist groups and more right-wing nationalists, there was an understanding of popular acceptance for a military takeover to restore order, later verified by societal approval of the militaristic Constitution and of the long-standing ban on former politicians from participating in politics that was instituted in 1980.¹⁷ The 1997 “post-modern” coup, in which the Islamist government of Necmettin Erbakan was gently ousted, was preceded by calls from many NGOs and civil society groups working on behalf of secularism for a “state” intervention against the government. And most recently, in 2007, the government’s call to place Abdullah Gül, an Islamist sympathizer,¹⁸ in the Turkish presidency was met with broad protests across Turkey, in which slogans such as “We have the army” were among the most flaunted.

While we can not dismiss the possibility of military involvement in provoking such “societal preparations” for past military interventions or, in the most recent example, at least military chest-thumping, there is nevertheless a distinguishing characteristic of civil-military relations in Turkey that is marked by broad societal support of the military and, ultimately, a widespread view of the military as the ultimate protector of the nation — even, if necessary, against its own political representatives. In other words, while

16. It is important to note that, as opposed to Western conceptualizations of a synonymy between the “state” and the “government,” in some parts of the world — for example, in places with imperial legacies — there has been an historic distinction between the two concepts. The state is seen as the steady, continuing institutional power, while the government is seen as a fluctuating sign of changing political power. Implicitly therefore, the former implied stability, and the latter an unstable potential.

17. H. Kemal Karpat, “Military Interventions: Army Civilian Relations in Turkey Before and After 1980,” in Metin Heper and Ahmet Evin, eds., *State, Democracy and the Military Turkey in the 1980s* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), p. 150.

18. The term “Islamist sympathizer” is used rather than Islamist, because for the purposes of this article President Gül is assumed to be more of a pragmatist who utilizes Islamist energy for political mobilization, rather than someone seeking a fundamental transformation of the nation into an Islamist state.

in most paradigms of civil-military relations the armed forces and the society (together with its political representatives) are posited in a confrontational manner,¹⁹ the Turkish paradigm traditionally has rested firmly on a structure in which the armed forces and the society enjoy a relatively complementary and symbiotic relationship, despite the Turkish army's periodic expansions of its prerogatives into the societal and political systems.²⁰

For the army, the pitfall of such an army-in-society approach in an ethnically and ideologically heterogeneous country such as Turkey is that societal divides could tear the institution of the army apart. Societal fragmentation, the potential for conflict, and shifting expectations and ideas about the future of the nation are all reflected in the army, and arguably could destroy it. The Turkish army has, however, built up insulating practices and mechanisms to both maintain its symbiotic relationship with society while keeping itself immune from society's fragmentive potential and "weaknesses."²¹

To do this, the Turkish army holds absolute control over the internal indoctrination of its personnel, drawing its members from the heart of the society, but then doing its best to keep them independent from popular national and international ideas and trends.²² The Turkish army is not the army of the elite, but is rather an elite-making institution. It recruits cadets largely from rural Anatolian towns, but with its carefully crafted and closed institutions, turns these Anatolian kids into a unique new societal elite — a group neither completely inside nor outside of society.²³ In many cases, while the immediate relatives of this new elite carry socially common ethnic and religious identities, the officers themselves become stripped of these identities through the military's own "elitization" process and absorb the institutional identity. Interestingly, they still feel a part of society and believe that they are the true representatives of the society.²⁴

But does society still feel that way? Starting in the 1990s, particularly with the advance of the European Union accession process, but also in the more recent years of

19. The confrontational manners are best characterized by the "prerogatives" approach to civil-military relations, in which military prerogatives are considered as something that always grow at the expense of societal interest. See Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Development of New Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) and Alfred Stepan, *The Military in Politics: Changing Patterns in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

20. Zeki Sarıgıl, "Deconstructing the Turkish Military's Popularity," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 35 (2009), pp. 709-728. Interestingly, the Turkish military's ability to reach out to society seems to even extend internationally. Turkish soldiers deployed in Afghanistan, Somalia, Kosovo, and even in Korea in the 1950s seem to have been able to develop bonds with the local populations. Thank you to Dr. Zeki Sarıgıl for personally bringing this to my attention.

21. Ersel Aydın, Nihat A. Özcan, and Dogan Akyaz, "The Turkish Military's March Toward Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (January/February 2006).

22. This does not mean that it never adjusts to the changing environment, but such adjustments are generally initiated by the army itself, not from the outside. These are generally "stylistic" adjustments, and have been exemplified by Kemalist ideology's occasional adoption of more left-wing tones or more Turkish nationalistic tendencies and have enabled the military to appear responsive to and inclusive of society's desires.

23. James Brown, "The Military and Society: The Turkish Case," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1989), pp. 387-404. Additionally, those with a background in Ottoman history may find an interesting parallel between this practice and the recruitment of Janissaries in southeastern Europe during the Ottoman period.

24. Ergun Özbudun, *Contemporary Turkish Politics: Challenges to Democratic Consolidation* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), p. 110.

relative political stability and strong political leadership, society's confidence in its politicians has strengthened, and signs of a growing dissonance in societal expectations from the military have grown.²⁵ Significantly, for example, public demonstrations in 2007 saw prominent displays of the slogan "Neither *Shari'a* nor Coup" — suggesting a shift in society's positioning of the military. Granted, Turkish society²⁶ still does not appear fully ready to replace its trust in the national army with trust in politics and democratic governance; it is used to having one eye on its guarantor of stability while running the risks of revolutionary reforms. However, this same society is coming to the realization that the long-time guard of the transformation (and even perhaps the instinct to desire such a guard) might itself become a major obstacle to the final stages of historical change, and this seems to lead to a fundamental challenge for the society: Will it irreversibly consolidate its bond with national politics and democratic governance and relegate the armed forces to becoming a tool with which the politicians defend the country from security threats? Regardless of the response to this question, an equally if not perhaps even more important question has to be whether the Turkish military is itself ready to understand this push for a paradigmatic change in its relationship with the society and with politics.

THE "PASHAS'" PARADIGMATIC DIVIDE

To understand the "Pashas'" readiness to adapt to this shift requires exploring an apparent gap between two groups within the military leadership. The first is a traditional conservative majority group that views the Turkish military as the ultimate guard of the *status quo* — the Republican regime, its territorial integrity, and its political parameters as established at the beginning of the Republic (e.g., secularism, assimilation into a unified national body, and the primacy of security over politics). The origin of this line of thinking stretches back to the troubled period at the end of the Ottoman Empire, when the physical survival of the Empire itself was the prime directive of political and administrative policies and therefore security concerns assumed centrality.

The second is a smaller, more progressive group that views the army's mission as one of guarding the ongoing transformation and modernization of the nation, without stalling this forward movement in the name of protecting the *status quo* — even if this means change within the army itself and its relationship with politics. It is difficult to trace any specific origins of such progressive thinking, but it is clear that Turkey's rapid process of integration with transnational organizations and global markets and the EU

25. In surveys on this question when the army was removed from the list of possibilities, the government emerged as the most trusted institution. "*İçinde ordu olmayan soru: En güvenilir hükümettir*" ["In a Survey Excluding the Army: The Most Trusted Is the Government"], *Hürriyet*, September 9, 2005. Moreover, there seems to be a new tone in society's communication with the army. A growing number of intellectuals, media figures, NGOs, and business representatives are increasingly critical of the military's involvement in politics. There has even emerged a liberal-Islamist alliance in Turkish intellectual life, the common denominator of which is its critical view of the army.

26. The author is aware that this usage of "society" appears to be stripping that body of its inherent fragmentation, but in recent years, with respect to the role of the military and democratic practices, there seems to be a greater homogenization — some might say alliance — among Turkey's liberal elite, conservative masses, and the Kurds. These formerly divergent political identities appear to be converging around the idea of democratic progress, which gives room to a more monolithic treatment of "society."

accession process in particular, as well as the Turkish army's close relationship with NATO and other Western security institutions, have had a major impact on this line of thinking and its proponents.

Societal expectations about the Turkish army's mission seem to be moving towards the progressive perspective, but some in the army are naturally having a hard time making the switch. To be fair, the fact that Turkey faces some genuine acute security challenges, such as those posed by Kurdish separatists, makes it difficult to answer the question of which security the Turkish army should prioritize. Are they to prioritize that which has been gained so far, even at the expense of further reform in Turkey, or should they continue to promote (or at minimum, allow) further reform, even if it risks jeopardizing what already has been gained?

It is important to note that there is no major distinction between the two groups with respect to the army's ultimate institutional goal: seeing Turkey become a modern, Westernized, Europeanized country. The division has more to do with the two camps' degrees of cautiousness. To make an analogy with the world of mutual funds, the conservatives in the army represent a more risk-averse, long-term investment, while the progressives can be seen as a riskier, speedier, growth fund. The growth fund types feel that the Turkish nation is ready for the completion of the modernization and democratization process, which requires putting its ultimate trust in the political realm, with the army's job being, at a maximum, one of protecting this transformation in support of the civilian leaders. The risk-averse conservatives remain cautious about the political realm's capacity to deal on its own with the country's many problems, and see the need for a continued military presence in politics to guide the nation through a difficult transformation to modernity.

The progressives are most clearly associated with Hilmi Özkök (the Turkish Chief of Staff between 2002 and 2006), and those who, like him, seek to speed up Turkey's global engagement and integration with the EU. They see a better chance for the preservation of the essence of Atatürk's revolutions via forward movement rather than an emphasis on the *status quo*. It was the progressive Özkök who presided over the military during Turkey's implementation of the vital reform packages of recent years, and who openly expressed his view that the Turkish military would "always support EU membership and the reforms that were made."²⁷ He also argued that conflicts such as that with Greece over the Aegean Sea, could be resolved "in a week" if Turkey were to take serious steps toward EU membership, and that the Turkish Armed Forces believes that EU membership would strengthen the social state, hasten economic development, and improve living standards and quality of life. Özkök also acknowledged that EU membership was "a public demand,"²⁸ and argued that if membership were achieved, it

27. "Özkök: AB üyeligi için ön şartımız yok" ["Özkök: We Do Not Have Preconditions for EU Membership"], *Zaman*, October 19, 2003. The vital reform packages, passed nearly a decade ago in response to requirements to meet the Copenhagen Criteria, included the reforming of the state security courts, the restructuring of the National Security Council, and the lifting of restrictions against public use of minority languages. The Turkish army leadership sees EU membership as a major source for economic and social advances that could serve social cohesiveness in Turkey.

28. "Özkök: AB yolu hata kaldırmaz" ["Özkök: The EU Path Does Not Tolerate Mistakes"], *Radikal*, October 30, 2004.

would even “reduce societal support for the PKK.”²⁹

The conservatives, on the other hand, emphasize Turkish society’s ideological and social fragmentation, and argue that revolutionary and risky moves — foregoing the watchful eye of the guardian army — would be disastrous. Their conservativeness is embedded in the strong conviction that “defending the country” means much more than simply defending the country’s borders. Rather, their inherited mission is more statically defined as guarding the achievements of the early Republican revolution, and can be better understood as coping with broader regime security concerns rather than territorial security.³⁰ Conservative Turkish army generals would like to see the transformation that most of them personally went through (from Anatolian boy to elite general) take place in the greater society, making Turkey more secular and Western, and more advanced economically and educationally. When they see this not occurring in large numbers or quickly enough, they conclude that there is a need for more time for that transformation to take place at the national level, and therefore, they should remain on alert for any setbacks that might risk what has been achieved. Such conservativeness naturally grows because their own transformation takes place quickly in a carefully isolated vacuum, but society’s transformation takes place very slowly in an open field, exposed to all kinds of winds and influences, both local and international.

Differences *vis à vis* EU membership also help to distinguish and highlight the two perspectives. As shown, the progressives are ready to embrace the EU and its demands fully, seeing that route as the best way to ensure Turkey’s forward movement. The conservatives are more likely to fear the possible implications of certain critical EU demands, such as those about minority rights. In a 2005 interview, former Chief of Staff General Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu (2000-2002) voiced the more cautious perspective of the conservatives when he expressed his grave concerns over the EU’s support for Kurdish nationalism:

The EU always says ‘Kurd, Kurdish ... education in Kurdish.’ If Kurdish becomes the media of education, what shall be the unifying structure, the national integrity? Turkey’s structure would decompose ... there is no end to these demands. When one step is made, another demand comes ... Today they say that Kurds should also be counted as a constituent nation in the Constitution. Then will come autonomy, a federative system, etc. ... What all this means is that Turkey will fall apart.³¹

It is also possible to see examples of complex internal balancing between individuals of these two different perspectives. When in 2002 the conservatives were unable to prevent the progressive General Özkök from becoming Chief of Staff, at the last moment, General Kıvrıkoğlu appointed another conservative, General Aytaç Yalman, then Commander of the Gendarmerie, to become Commander of Land Forces. This meant an automatic retirement of a potential progressive figure, General Edip Baser.³² By doing this, Kıvrıkoğlu hoped that Aytaç Yalman would slow down Hilmi Özkök’s progressive

29. Interview with Özkök in Fikret Bila, *Komutanlar Cephesi [The Commanders’ Front]* (Istanbul: Detay Yayıncılık, 2007), p. 221.

30. George S. Harris, “The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics Part I,” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter 1965), p. 59.

31. Fikret Bila, “*Sorun TSK değil AB’nin çifte tutumu*” [“The Problem Is Not the Turkish Armed Forces But the EU’s Double-Sided Attitude”], *Milliyet*, December 31, 2005.

32. Sükrü Küçükşahin, Interview with General Kıvrıkoğlu, *Hürriyet*, March 10, 2008.

actions and toughen up his soft approach towards the politicians. General Kıvrıkoğlu's major reservations against Özkök succeeding him as Chief of Staff were based on his conservative perspective that Özkök's positions were "too close to civilian minds"³³ and that he was too weak in his potential to fight against religious fundamentalism. This perspective clearly shows the distinct approaches that these two commanders in their respective positions with the military had concerning the army's relations with politicians and politics. Özkök's response was that "history will show" whose approach is better in order to "tame" Turkey's major challenges of political Islam and the Kurdish issue.³⁴

The long-enduring persistence of the conservative view and the relative paucity of progressives are hardly surprising if we consider that the Turkish military's top leadership always has been under a very rigid "intra-institutional" peer opinion pressure. Years of completely isolationist policies with respect to the lives of the General Staff, starting from their cadet days, to living in isolated military compounds, not only separated them from their natural "other" (i.e., civilians) but also led to the formation of an internal group pressure that the Turkish military should remain isolated, should not trust civilians and politics, and always should take a rigid position against any "risky" political move. Even in retirement, the overwhelming majority of the top leadership in the Turkish military spends its post-service years within military housing and compounds,³⁵ tended to by military personnel, and isolated from civilians. Being in the army can be described as a lifetime commitment and lifestyle choice, rather than a simple profession, and thus few in the army can imagine a *post*-military life — either psychologically or physically. With such a complete sense of belonging and immersion comes a fear of being isolated or ostracized from the group, and such a fear makes it extremely difficult for those within the military to engage in self-evaluation and critical assessment of their institution, its role, and its functions.

The conservatives' longtime majority also has been supported by certain practices (both legal and illegal) that have served to reinforce and reproduce the conservative agenda within the military itself and within society. A collective of associations loosely connected with the security establishment and the military but with civilian ties as well³⁶ have periodically fanned the fears of security risks, from destructive challenges of ethnic and ideological movements to those of "foreign enemies," and in doing so have helped to "securitize" public opinion. Such a securitized context strengthens the conservative wing of the military, which considers itself as being on call at any moment to save the nation, even, if necessary, at the cost of the political process.

However, with societal determination in support of political processes and democratic institutions growing, the Turkish military leadership, both conservative and progressive, now faces the challenge of redesigning its relationship with society under the latter's terms and expectations — and not their own. It appears that the military leadership can no longer afford an openly confrontational relationship with the political leadership. Observ-

33. Küçüksahin, Interview with General Kıvrıkoğlu, *Hürriyet*, March 10, 2008.

34. "Özkök'ten Anında Cevap" ["Özkök's Immediate Response"], *Hürriyet*, March 11, 2008.

35. The one exception among recent retired Chiefs of Staffs is, unsurprisingly perhaps, Hilmi Özkök, who chose to settle in a private house on the Aegean rather than in an army compound.

36. This group includes the established business elite, major media institutions, and state-related trade unions and business chambers. Their commitment to secularization and secular principles established at the beginning of the Republic conflict with Islamist ideas.

ing the current leadership's transformation from a more hardline to a more accommodat- ing and progressive attitude and discourse gives clues to the paradigm shift underway.

THREE GENERALS, ONE PATTERN

The most recently retired Chief of Staff's tenure provides a good starting point for looking at how such a paradigm shift is taking place. Many conservatives hoped that General Büyükanıt (Chief of Staff, 2006-2009) could reverse the progressive momentum initiated by his predecessor, Hilmi Özkök, and he was initially presented as the antibody of the "Özkökian" understanding of civil-military relations in Turkey. Eventually however, he grew in many ways to more closely resemble Özkök. Under Büyükanıt's control, the army was cooperative with the government. The one possible exception might be the April 27, 2007 "e-ultimatum,"³⁷ but that remains a mystery as to whether it was prepared by or even confirmed by Büyükanıt since he has never spoken publicly of the incident. Moreover, the fact that the current Chief of Staff, Ilker Basbug, has changed the policy of using the army's webpage as a platform for major announcements supports the argument that the preparation, content, and dissemination of the e-ultimatum might have come from beyond the control of the highest command. In terms of the army's cooperation during Büyükanıt's time as Chief of Staff, we see it revealed not only in the case of Abdullah Gül's election as President, but also when it showed reticence in reacting to the lifting of the headscarf ban. While the Turkish Armed Forces staunchly retained its position on the ban on headscarf in public spaces, in line with the will of the people, they agreed to work with the "lawfully elected President" whose legitimacy was "unquestionable."³⁸

Another example of how, even in sensitive issues of foreign policy and security, the military appeared willing to be subordinate to the government's decisions and pursue a policy of cooperation can be seen with respect to northern Iraq and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In statements made in the lead up to the January 2008 operation³⁹ in northern Iraq, Büyükanıt made clear:

On 24 October 2007, the Prime Ministry asked our opinions about the operation covered in the resolution. We submitted our opinions on 1 November 2007. Thereby, we communicated our proposals to the Prime Ministry. The Prime Ministry and Ministry of Foreign Affairs are currently working on these proposals. This will turn into a government directive, and will be transmitted to us. Indeed, that is the normal planning procedure. Now, the authority resides with the government. They will assess. If they deem that an operation is necessary, then they will say that 'such operations should be made' ... we now wait for the government directive. We will do what is necessary according to that directive. There is no delay in the process.⁴⁰

37. This refers to a statement released during the night on the military's webpage, in which the army, in response to the government's plans to elect an "Islamist" to the presidency, protested with harsh language that appeared to threaten some form of intervention.

38. Fikret Bila, "Büyükanıt'ın tebrik ziyaretindeki mesajlar" ["Mr. Büyükanıt's Messages at the Congratulatory Visit"], *Milliyet*, September 11, 2007.

39. The PKK uses northern Iraq as a safe haven. The TSK (Turkish Armed Forces) has therefore made occasional interventions into northern Iraqi territory in attempts to disrupt this strategic advantage that the insurgents have.

40. "Büyükanıt: Direktif bekliyoruz, geldiği an gireriz" ["We Wait for the Directive: We Will
[Continued on next page]

Büyükant also stated that the scale of the operation would be determined by the government's directives. Even after the operation had begun, civil-military cooperation continued. The army and government showed a firm, joint stance towards northern Iraqi Kurdish leader Masud Barzani and anyone else who did not condemn the PKK as a terrorist organization,⁴¹ and the army made a gesture to the politicians by placing limitations on former military personnel's public speech — essentially discouraging them from making anti-government remarks.⁴² General Büyükant again revealed a progressive shift in his positioning when responding to a question about heightened Turkish military presence in Afghanistan. Despite having openly expressed opposition to the possibility at the beginning of his tenure as Chief of Staff, he later announced that such a decision was up to the Turkish government.⁴³

All in all, other than some ultimately insignificant verbal squabbles between the army and the politicians, there was unprecedented harmony between the government and the military throughout the period leading up to the operation and throughout its execution. Their cooperation reached such levels that for perhaps the first time in the history of the Republic, the army got into a public verbal disagreement with the leadership of the CHP Party (founded by Atatürk) and the Nationalist MHP, leading to the ironic situation that the once-upon-a-time hardliner, Chief of Staff Büyükant, had to be defended by the Islamist Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan against the secular political parties.

Turning to the current Chief of Staff, General Ilker Basbug, his term also started with concerns from civilian politicians about his possible hawkish attitudes towards the government. He started his term in the midst of the Ergenekon controversy,⁴⁴ an investigation which resulted in the arrests of various retired army generals and other leading public figures on accusations of plotting a coup against the AKP-led government. Upon assuming the Chief of Staff position, Basbug announced that he, on behalf of the army, would make an official visit to the two top-ranking imprisoned generals.⁴⁵ Despite this apparent sign of protest against the government-led investigation, he later chose to send a low-ranking

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Intervene As Soon As It Comes"], *Hürriyet*, November 9, 2007.

41. "Terör örgütü demeyeni muhatap almamız" ["We Won't Deal with Anyone Who Doesn't Call the PKK a Terrorist Organization"], *Hürriyet*, October 4, 2007; "Erdogan: Barzani teröre yataklık ediyor" ["Erdogan: Barzani Is Nurturing Terror"], *Hürriyet*, October 30, 2007; "Büyükant'tan çok sert sözler" ["Very Harsh Words from Büyükant"], *Hürriyet*, October 1, 2007.

42. "Emekli askere orduevi yasagi getiriliyor" ["Banning Army Guesthouses for Retired Officers"], *Sabah*, October 18, 2007.

43. "Büyükant: Devlet karar verecek" ["Büyükant: The Government Will Decide"], *Hürriyet*, March 25, 2008.

44. The name "Ergenekon" has been given to this investigation and trial by the investigating authorities and prosecutors in reference to a secret organization, alleged to have conducted illegal covert activities aimed at destabilizing the political environment and paving the way for a coup/intervention that would in turn produce a more security-minded administration. There have been analogies made between this alleged organization and the "Gladio" groups uncovered in some European countries after the Cold War, the goal of which was to conduct irregular warfare in the event of Communist occupation. For a useful resource in English see Akin Unver, "Turkey's 'Deep State' and the Ergenekon Conundrum," *Policy Brief*, Middle East Institute (April 2009), <http://mei.edu/Publications/WebPublications/PolicyBriefs/PolicyBriefArchive/tabid/539/ctl/Detail/mid/1611/xmid/597/xmfid/17/Default.aspx>.

45. Press release, Turkish General Staff, September 2, 2008, http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV-1-Basin-Yayin-Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2008/BA_40.html.

general in his place. In his early speeches, Basbug also stressed that the priority of the Turkish Armed Forces was the “fight against terrorism,”⁴⁶ a sign that the military would be prioritizing its “regular,” externally oriented military mission, and nothing else.

In terms of the military leadership’s concerns over its public relations with society, Basbug quickly made several statements and moves indicating a desire to maintain, and even improve, the relationship. During his various encounters with the public and press, Basbug has made clear his intention to follow in the accommodative direction of his immediate predecessors, stating that the army would not concern itself with domestic political matters and would only express its views, when necessary, via the National Security Council.⁴⁷ He has sought to further consolidate the progressive line of thinking within the military leadership with his conceptualization of the Turkish military’s power in Turkish politics and life, arguing that the military’s influence stems from its soft power characteristics rather than its hard power ones: “The Turkish military is not getting its power from its weapons but from the Turkish society’s love and trust in its armed forces.”⁴⁸ He also has pointed out that *who* Turkey is is more important than *where* Turkey is. In other words, Turkey’s identity, which he describes as being the strongest democratic secular regime in the region, is the country’s greatest asset, not its strategic location.

His discursive efforts as signs of a paradigm shift were highlighted in his annual address in April 2009, in which he allocated an unprecedented amount of the speech to the topic of civil-military relations.⁴⁹ He first presented a virtual literature review of the scholarly work on civil-military relations — a sign of his effort to locate the Turkish military in a globally accepted civil-military relations standard. Most strikingly, he repeatedly emphasized in the speech the idea that the civilian leadership is the ultimate power in Turkey and that the military is ready to change. Granted this was done at the rhetorical level, but it is nevertheless hugely significant since it is a public certification of something that the previous two Chiefs of Staff only mentioned in passing. Moving beyond the actual words of his speech, the fact that so much of it was devoted to the once taboo topic of the military’s role in politics is revolutionary, as it legitimizes all future discussion — opening up a Pandora’s box of debate that the military will not be able to control, but which the institution appears ready to take part in and go along with.

Perhaps the most concrete sign of the shift in the military leadership’s understanding of its own role has been the approach taken during the Ergenekon investigation and trial. When initial rumors emerged during General Özkök’s term that some of his own commanders were allegedly involved in making coup preparations, the Chief of Staff announced publicly that, if asked by the courts, he would be willing to testify against any coup plotters — something he has since done in a closed session with the prosecutors. Under General Büyükanıt, the actual arrests of certain retired generals alleged to be connected with the coup plotting were made without intervention from the Chief of

46. İsmail Küçükkaya, “Basbug’un ‘normalleşme’ stratejisi” [“Basbug’s ‘Normalization’ Strategy”], *Aksam*, September 18, 2008.

47. Fikret Bila, “Org. Basbug Doneminin Çizgileri” [“Lines of Basbug’s Term”], *Milliyet*, September 17, 2008.

48. “Org. İlker Basbug ‘un Genelkurmay askanlığı Devir-Teslim Toreni Konuşması” [“General Basbug’s Speech at the General Staff Handover Ceremony”], August 28, 2008, <http://www.tsk.mil.tr>.

49. The full text of the speech can be found at http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2009/org_ilkerbasbug_harpak_konusma_14042009.html.

Staff's office. Finally, General Basbug has continued the policy of cooperation with the judicial process, allowing a second round of arrests to pass without question — arrests that would have been unimaginable in earlier years.

These changes in discourse and in actions indicate that the military leadership is growing more consolidated within a progressive agenda, and that the conservative argument is losing its centrality. In particular, the attitudes and actions of these three generals with respect to the Ergenekon trial reveal their disassociation from the conservative discourse and their proactive efforts to help remove the remaining agents of securitization which have provided a vital infrastructure for the military's conservative figures. Eliminating these figures will remove the major obstacles to finding the military's proper place within the Turkish political system and to fostering a healthier relationship with a democratic Turkish society.

A POTENTIAL PITFALL: THE PKK CHALLENGE

In spite of this new accommodative attitude there still remains one problematic issue posing a substantial risk to a full-scale, concrete shift in the military's role: the PKK and its ongoing violence. Not only do such attacks naturally lead to a greater physical deployment of the military, they complicate efforts for a paradigm shift at a philosophical level as well. Attacks in the fall of 2008 resulted in the deaths of dozens of Turkish soldiers and, subsequently, sharp criticisms of the military by the media and the public. The criticisms were that despite years of experience in running an anti-terror campaign, the military was making preventable mistakes in guaranteeing the operational safety of the soldiers, not maintaining acceptable human rights standards in their own practices, and not being as transparent as possible in its affairs. These criticisms in turn sparked occasional outbursts of harsher, more conservative-style rhetoric by the military leadership. Even Chief of Staff Basbug, who has gained an image as a more analytical commander with an expressed interest in pursuing an approach to the Kurdish question that addresses the issue's social, economic, and political dimensions, lashed out emotionally and harshly in response to some media criticisms of the military's recent performance.⁵⁰

Such a response and other examples of increased conservative rhetoric by the military are perhaps understandable from the perspective of a military leadership whose greatest fear is losing control over the integrity of its own rank and file. The failure of the commanding leadership to stand behind its rank and file and to defend the prestige of the military, and thus support its morale when it is under both verbal and physical attack, risks a true breakdown of the institution itself. The military leadership's fear of such a breakdown is evident in the words of a retired general: "If the homeland is in jeopardy, the army can save it. But if the army is in jeopardy, who can save us?"⁵¹ Unfortunately, this fear, along with an overall defensive attitude towards criticisms, en-

50. He was reported to have declared, "Those who present terrorist organizations' acts as successful [implying inadequacy of the army's performance], will be held responsible for future bloodshed." See "Org. Basbug'dan Sert Acıklama" ["Tough Words from General Basbug"], *Hürriyet*, October 15, 2008.

51. Interview by author with an anonymous Turkish Brigadier General, Ankara, December 5, 2006.

courages more conservative discourse, and may create a genuine obstacle to a practical adaptation of the paradigmatic shift — even if there is evidence that the leadership has come to philosophically and practically agree with it.

A SOCIETAL ARMY REDEFINED

To ensure that this pitfall is avoided and the progressive military leadership can prevent the PKK surge from pushing them into a resecuritization and radicalization trap, the army leadership has to remain firm in their adoption of the progressive thinking of the Özkök era that seems to be continuing under Generals Büyükanıt and Basbug. It should remember that Turkish society always has wanted progressive changes for a better economy, better democracy, and better integration with the West. It should not exaggerate calls for military intervention, as they may be expressing the sentiments of fringe elements. It is important to recall that most prominent at the 2007 demonstrations were calls for “neither *Shari‘a* nor coup,” an indication that the public is refusing all brands of radicalism and fringe political positions. What they want is a movement towards the West, but a safe one that would prevent any serious damage to Turkish identity. The army should strive to consolidate its progressive vision whereby it sees its role as one of the guarantors of this transformation, rather than as a gatekeeper; as a safety provider of change, rather than a means for stopping change when deemed necessary. The army should remain calm, therefore, if society shows its loyalty to the political realm. They should view such societal support for a paradigmatic shift in Turkish civil-military relations as a sign to their own credit, and that all those years of the *a la Turca* paradigm has helped build up a mature societal consciousness. Throughout the process, Turkey’s modernization project has not only survived, but has produced a more confident society, ready to take control of its own democratic destiny.

The traditional Turkish civil-military paradigm has been a by-product of a special historic relationship between the vast majority of Turkish society and its conscript army. It can not therefore be understood or conceptualized without understanding the dynamics of the Turkish societal instincts such as its deep fears of (in)security and disorder, which are at the core of its existential bond with the army. It appears that the more Turkish society can control such fears by building up further confidence in democracy and political processes, the greater the will becomes to turn a direct bond with the army into an indirect one under civilian oversight. The signs of such a move point to a paradigm shift in Turkish civil-military relations. It appears that a growing segment of the Turkish army leadership has grasped the importance of this shift and what it means for the Turkish army and is bowing to its demands.

To make the final push in avoiding the PKK-induced securitization pitfall, the military leadership needs the help of a final group: the politicians. The politicians, and in particular the AKP government, must not forget that they will not be contributing positively to the transformation of an institution like the army if they are in a confrontational relationship with it — and to his credit, Prime Minister Erdogan seems aware of this. The Turkish political leadership must recognize the dilemma in which the military is placed when it is asked to transform politically while engaged in active combat. To alleviate this problem, political leaders must relieve the military from its current position of primary responsibility for the PKK problem. It must do this by outlining a

comprehensive strategy for dealing with the PKK and the Kurdish question, one that includes social, political, economic, and military aspects, and then instruct the army of its role. By removing the military from its central position in dealing with the PKK, the political realm can help create a comfort zone for the military leadership within which they can move beyond the securitization dilemma and thus pave the way for a final consolidation of the progressive paradigm of Turkish civil-military relations.