

# **The Armored Constitution: The Military, Islam, and Democracy in Turkey**

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**Abstract:** What is the role of the military in Turkish democracy? Turkey's military has successfully brought down four governments in Turkey's sixty years of multiparty politics, yet throughout this period the Turkish Armed Forces upheld its commitment to democracy, never holding onto power for an extended period. Scholars on civil-military affairs tend to label Turkey an exception. This paper aims to explain that exception.

In an attempt to explain the behavior of Turkey's military, I will draw from the existing literature on civil-military relations to develop a theory of "armored constitutionalism." This model argues that in weak democracies, in lieu of a strong constitutional regime, militaries can form the backbone of the democratic state. A benign praetorianism is possible if the armed forces are subject to proper restraints. Using historical evidence, I will argue that the armored constitutionalism model explains the behavior of the Turkish military.

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## Section I. Introduction

Turkey is a difficult country to handle in the comparative political context. Its modern founders built it to resemble Europe, yet its population is Muslim, and it did not participate in World War II<sup>1</sup>—the event central to shaping modern Europe. It is geographically located in the Middle East, yet it is democratic, resource poor, and lacks a colonial history. It is ethnolinguistically Central Asian, yet it has no experience of communist domination. For these reasons and more, Samuel Huntington (1993) labeled Turkey the “prototypical torn country,” unclear of where it belongs in the world order. Ernest Gellner, similarly bewildered, called Turkey’s comparative political development “an exception...profoundly eccentric” in which “the army, the guardian of this new democratic tradition, allows free elections to take place” (1997: 237-243).

Indeed, Turkey’s Armed Forces are an anomaly both in the historical record and in their geographical region. Its officers have deposed four governments in the past fifty years, yet after every coup the military has returned power to civilians through free elections. In none of these cases was the army forced to concede power because of mismanagement, popular unrest, or military defeat—it returned power because of its commitment to democratic government. Is such a system possible in a democracy? This paper will argue that it is. After attempting to apply selected theories of civil-military relations to the Turkish case, I will construct a new model of “armored constitutionalism.” This new model will argue that militaries, under the right constraints, can behave as an armored constitution: as an institution bound by pre-commitments yet responsive to popular sovereignty, setting the boundaries of democracy while underpinning

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<sup>1</sup> Turkey mobilized for WWII and symbolically joined the Allies Forces in February of 1945. Still, it remained mostly aloof to the fighting and huge demographic changes that engulfed Europe.

the stability of the political system. By reviewing evidence from Turkey's four modern coups, I will argue that this model indeed explains the modern behavior of the Turkish military.

## Section II: Methodology

This dissertation reaches its conclusion first by theorizing and then by testing through an in-depth single case study. The case study consists of a comparative history of Turkey's four military coups. The inspiration for the model of armored constitutionalism comes both from the classic works on military-civil relations, and from my own experiences of having lived, studied, and traveled extensively in Turkey, including during the attempted "judicial coup" of 2008. I did not undertake any formal interviews, but I have over the years had in-depth conversations on these issues with dozens of Turks from various backgrounds. My comparison of civil-military models and their applicability to Turkey is by no means meant to be exhaustive, but is rather intended to point out that Turkey's military is often treated as an exception by the literature, and not explained much further. Applying the armored constitutionalist model to other cases might have helped to generalize the model for insights into other militaries, such as those of Algeria and Indonesia. However, I believe that, as Daniel Zblatt once said, political science is best done by "foxes"—people who attempt to solve specific problems based on their expertise (2006). Thus, my aims are confined to helping fill a weakness in the literature—the poor explanation of the Turkish case by traditional theories of civil-military relations.

### Section III. A Misfit: Turkey's Place in Traditional Theories of Civil-Military Relations

#### **The Turkish Military as a Professional Interventionist**

Samuel Huntington founded the modern study of civil-military relations with the publication of the *Soldier and the State*. Huntington's thesis was that civilians control modern militaries by "professionalizing" them (1957). As militaries become more competent, autonomous, and focused on national defense, he argues, "self-centeredness" makes them obedient to whichever civilian group "secures legitimate authority" (1957: 84). The "antithesis" of professionalism is, therefore, military involvement in politics. Huntington goes on to outline five patterns of civil-military relations, based on three binary indicators: The compatibility of the "prevailing ideology in society" to military power, the amount of political power that the military enjoys, and the level of military "professionalism" that officers exhibit (1957: 96-7).

None of Huntington's patterns accurately describes Turkish civil-military relations. In polls, Turks have historically placed the military as by far the most trusted institution in the country—as good of an empirical indicator as any that society has a "pro-military ideology."<sup>2</sup> The Turkish Armed Forces, with four coups in the past fifty years, must also be considered to have high political power. Professionalism proves to be a tricky term here. As a member of NATO, and as a highly competent force with strong internal unity, Turkey's military deserves to be called professional. Huntington himself in 1957 singled out the Turkish military for its

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<sup>2</sup> In one recent poll by the newspaper Hurriyet, besides showing Turks' famous sympathy for their military, also showed that half of respondents even agreed that the military should still sometimes intervene in politics. See <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/feb/23/turks-xenophobic-conservative-poll>> Accessed 03/08/2010. Huntington identifies multiple political ideologies, with only conservatism being compatible with high political power for the military. Turkish society has generally supported conservative parties in elections.

exceptional professionalism compared to armed forces of other developing countries.<sup>3</sup> However, civilians do not “still maintain...objective control” over Turkey’s military—the military does not blindly serve those who come to power via ballots. Yet, this is what Huntington observes in other states that mix pro-military ideologies with politically powerful, professional militaries. Thus, Huntington’s theory fails to explain the Turkish case.

Samuel Finer, in *The Man on Horseback*, critiques Huntington’s theory, showing how professionalism can actually *cause* military interventionism. A professionalized military might simply claim allegiance to the state or nation, instead of to the current government, and then assert a right to intervene on that basis (Finer, 1976). This is precisely how the Turkish military acts, and how a large portion of society perceives the military. As one Turkish officer cadet explained to a reporter in the 1980s:

We are opposed to anybody, no matter whether they are there by the grace of the ballot box or the votes of the National Assembly, who attempts to violate Ataturk’s principles. We have a right to act to this end in the interests of our people, and for their protection (Birand, 1991: 22).

Indeed, according to Finer, civilians are only free from praetorianism—interventionist militaries—when these militaries explicitly believe in civilian supremacy (1976: 25). Finer goes on to develop concepts of military “custodianship,” in which the military assumes a role similar to the “head of state,” acting as a “balance wheel to the constitution,” and intervening when the political authorities fall “out of alignment.” He continues to explain that this is how nearly all intervening militaries see themselves, although it is rarely true. He acknowledges, however, that Turkey is an exception, claiming that the Turkish military’s 1960 coup was a reaction against

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<sup>3</sup> Huntington’s published his book in 1957, before Turkey’s first modern military coup in 1960. At the time of his writing, Turkey’s military had recently fought admirably in Korea and joined NATO, while Turkey’s government had made a seemingly successful transition to multiparty democracy.

efforts by the ruling party to use the military against the opposition (1976: 36-38). I will expand on many of Finer's observations in developing my model of Turkey's armored constitutionalism.

### **Turkish Officers as Moderators, Guardians, and Rulers**

Eric Nordlinger, in *Soldiers and Politics* (1977), builds on Finer and Huntington's works to outline three major types of officer classes that characterize military-dominated regimes: moderators, guardians, and rulers. Frank Tachau and Metin Heper, in *The State, Politics, and the Military in Turkey*, apply Nordlinger's typology to the Turkish experience, showing that Turkey's military officers, at different junctures, have exhibited each of the three types.

According to Tachau and Heper, a ruler type of regime took power and dominated Turkey from 1923 until 1950 (1983: 18). In Nordlinger's typology, this denotes an officer class that brings about basic changes in the distribution of power," and attempts to "control large slices of political, economic, and social life through the creation of mobilization structures." Unlike guardians, who typically promise to return power to civilians within a few years, ruler types "make no such commitment." After ten years of civilian rule in Turkey from 1950-1960, the military returned to power with a guardian-type coup in 1960. Guardians include officers who overthrow regimes and hold onto power for "a period of two to four years." They often originate as moderators who tire of repeated intervention, and resemble moderators in their commitment to "the preservation of the status quo." Guardians also typically attempt "mild political and economic changes," in order to correct the deficiencies of the previous government, but do not mobilize masses.

Tachau and Heper acknowledge that the officer class evolved into a moderator by the time of the 1971 coup "by memorandum," in which the Turkish military forced Prime Minister

Süleyman Demirel to resign by releasing a statement of disapproval (1983: 23). This progression from ruler type, to guardian type, and finally to moderator type is the opposite of the logic suggested by Nordlinger's model—in which praetorian militaries intervene more deeply over time. Because Tachau and Heper wrote their piece in 1983, they did not have the ability to fully appraise the 1980 coup or comment on the 1997 “post-modern coup.” The 1980 coup regime, in which the Turkish military ruled a depoliticized state for three years, was between a guardian and a ruler type.<sup>4</sup> Unlike guardian and moderator officer types, which intervene to protect the status quo, the Turkish military worked to create a new polity by closing all existing political parties and jailing all leading politicians. Yet, unlike ruler types, which hold onto power indefinitely, the Turkish military set a date for elections in 1983 and honored the results.<sup>5</sup> The most recent coup of 1997, in which the military deposed a government by communiqué but did not seize power, resembles the moderator type, offering another example of the anomalous ruler type to moderator type transition.

Nordlinger's typology is useful for thinking about Turkey's coups in isolation, but it fails to explain the aggregate behavior of Turkey's military or to locate the military vis-à-vis other political institutions. Indeed, Tachau and Heper do not even attempt to apply the model to the Turkish military's behavior over the long haul, conceding that Turkey's military-civilian relations overall have been “virtually unique.” (1983: 18). Indeed, Turkey's civil-military relations do not resemble Guillermo O'Donnell's celebrated “bureaucratic authoritarianism”

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<sup>4</sup> William Hale characterizes this coup as strictly a guardian type. However, the aim of the military, which banned every party and leading politician from the previous two decades, was clearly to create a new politics in Turkey. In addition, the military spearheaded a transition to a free-market economy. Guardian types, in contrast, act to protect the status quo, with patches to solve the problems of the previous regime. See Hale, 1994: 315.

<sup>5</sup> The southeastern part of the country remained under martial law (OHAL) for most of the next two decades, due to a war waged by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) against the military. This is not directly related to the military coup, and a high military presence remains in the region to this day.

model of technocratic military-civilian coalitions found in Latin America (see Collier, 1979), or the tendency of Middle Eastern militaries to focus on keeping ruling families in power.

#### Section IV. A New Model: Armored Constitutionalism

Existing models of civil-military relations tend to fail to explain Turkey, or treat Turkey's experience as an exception. To explain the Turkish case we will construct a new model, called "armored constitutionalism." This section will theoretically develop the model, while the next section will offer historical evidence to show that this model describes how Turkey's military has historically behaved.

The armored constitutionalism model asserts that professionalized militaries, in the context of underdeveloped civilian institutions, can behave as a constitutional type of actor, making the state safe for democracy. Such a military assumes three roles in society. Firstly, it restricts the parameters for debating national identity in places where such issues have not been sufficiently settled by civil means. Secondly, it acts as Finer's "balancing wheel," intervening in political breakdowns and working to exclude extremists. Thirdly, in addition to its political roles, the military retains its original mandate to maintain a monopoly on violence at home and peace abroad. Crucially, the military can only successfully fulfill the role of armored constitution if it can resist the temptation to seize power indefinitely. Officers only return to their barracks when they are bound by restrictions, of which there are three types: fear of politicization, fealty to democratic ideologies, and the challenge of modernization effects—the barriers to military rule that accrue in advanced societies.

Safeguarding the identity of the regime is the most important role of the military in politics of contested states. Ideally, a state's identity is an abstract notion enshrined in symbolic

institutions, such as a monarch or a constitution, and is divorced from ethno-sectarian distinctions. More often, state identity has ethno-confessional implications, which can cause deep cleavages in democracies. Highly developed democracies have strong civil institutions, such as independent courts, a free press, and a self-policing culture of tolerance that help to manage identity disputes. Yet, even in these societies, militaries implicitly safeguard fundamental identity, because violence is the only decisive method for settling identity disputes. In the United States, for example, which has strong civil institutions, the issue of slavery could not be settled by civil means, and desegregation required military enforcement. In the lesser-developed democracies of the armored constitutionalism model, the military, as a political actor, uses the implicit threat of force to draw red lines on the debate over public identity, and it uses coups to forestall civil war when it deems necessary.

The military also works to safeguard democracy from breakdowns and extremist challenges. Such breakdowns present small risks to states with strong civil societies and slow rates of change, such as Belgium. But deadlock, corruption, and disorder are serious threats to the political system in developing countries, because they sow the seeds of doubt about the value of democracy amongst the population. This opens space for opportunist demagogues and extremist anti-system parties. Such was the case in Weimar Germany, where the governments could not maintain legitimacy in the face of political violence and economic breakdown; it could also become the case in contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan. In the armored constitutionalist model, militaries intervene to close down extremist political groups, prevent anarchy, and restructure electoral rules to forestall a return to deadlock. The military's traditional role as a monopolizer of violence makes it a natural actor against democratic breakdown, especially when it is accompanied by political violence.

## **The Need for Constraints Against Military Rule**

Militaries, like all actors in politics, are self-interested and corruptible by power. Unlike civilians, the military is highly organized and has access to arms, making it relatively easy for the military to seize power. Yet militaries in most countries do not rule, because of various restraints (Finer 1976). The first restraint on militaries in the armored constitutional model is the fear of becoming over-involved in politics. Militaries in the armored constitutionalism model are aware that extended power grabs encourage factionalism and corruption, decreasing the military's effectiveness not only as an interventionist, but also as a fighting force. Furthermore, the military lacks the technical expertise to properly run a government. Poor performance, in turn, decreases the military's prestige, making it more difficult to retain legitimacy for future interventions.

Ideology serves as another key restraint on military interventionism. Internally, the military must subscribe to an ideology that ultimately recognizes the desirability of democratic rule and the principle of popular sovereignty. If the military does not respect these concepts, then it will become out of touch with society and lose the ability to intervene effectively. Likewise, the prevailing ideology of society must respect the military's role as guardian of the state while retaining a low tolerance for military rule, brutality, and corruption (Huntington 1957). Such compatible ideologies are both necessary and sufficient to create a polity conducive to armored constitutionalism. Lastly, militaries must recognize the importance of their image in society, and disseminate a benign view of their politics through propaganda and universal conscription.

Modernization effects comprise the third group of restraints preventing the military from unwarranted interventionism and indefinite holds on power. As the economy grows and the state becomes more involved in the world system, military intervention becomes increasingly difficult. Officers fear spooking international investors and hurting their country's reputation.

International bodies, such as EU and NATO, typically bind advanced countries to norms that do not condone military rule. Even in the event of a crisis, modernization heightens the technical deficiencies that hamstring a military seeking to rule, because the military is completely incapable of administering a modern society on its own. The military can only overcome these deficiencies by collaborating with civilians. This increases the distance between the military and the mechanisms of political machinery, while making the military's hold on power more tenuous—civilians in an advanced polity will not cooperate with military rule for an extended period.

Additionally, modernization allows states to overcome the need for military guardianship. Stronger political parties and more developed political cultures reduce the likelihood of state breakdown and violence. Political cleavages in advanced societies move away from identity issues towards a left-right economic cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Debates are focused more on economic issues, something that national assemblies are better equipped to handle. As civil society, the judiciary, and written constitutions strengthen as legitimate, autonomous institutions, they claw back responsibilities from the military. Free media can uncover coup plots in advance, embarrassing officers and thwarting further interventionism. A wealth of empirical data supports the concept of modernization effects, with studies showing that the probability of a military coup occurring in a country strongly decreases as wealth in that country increases (Londregan & Poole 1990).

The military, adjusting to these constraints, applies increasingly subtle and predictable methods to exert power, rather than favoring direct intervention. Armored constitutionalist militaries confine their interest in policy to increasingly narrow fields, typically those that impinge on national security, which becomes more narrowly defined as countries become more

modern (Finch 1998: 40). Militaries work to create official institutions for civil-military discourse, often called a national security council. As the civilian powers assert supremacy over the military, the military increasingly has to appeal to public support—typically by making public statements, also known as the “tutelary pattern” (1998: 42). But publics in advanced polities will signal that they will not tolerate frequent intervention. Only in the most dire of circumstances does the military seize overt power, and every seizure is followed by a guaranteed return to civilian power through elections.

### **Is the Concept of Armored Constitutionalism Even Possible in a Democracy?**

The concept of armored constitutionalism, in which a military intervenes to protect a democracy, seems to be a contradiction in terms. But democracies have always required non-democratic mechanisms to survive. In America, for instance, there is the Bill of Rights, which amongst other items guarantees the separation of church and state. Such a document is fundamentally undemocratic, but that is its point, as Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson once noted:

The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials and to establish them as legal principles...One’s right to...freedom of worship and assembly, and other fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote: they depend on the outcome of no elections.<sup>6</sup>

The role of constitutional courts in the United States is similarly undemocratic—rulings are “based on a superstitious fealty to the intent of the Framers [of the American Constitution],” instead of popular sovereignty (Holmes 1988: 195). Yet such compromises with democracy are widely considered to be necessary to protect states from what Friedrich Hayek called the “self-

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<sup>6</sup> See *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, at 638. Quoted in Holmes, 1988.

defeating character of constitutionally unlimited [democratic] government” (1970: 176-192). The difference is that in Turkey, there is only one recognized “framer”—Atatürk, and the military acts politically based on its interpretations of his intentions. A strong constitution and an independent judiciary would be preferable, but modern Turkey is a young state that has been slow to create legitimate civilian institutions to replace those destroyed in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In the absence of these civilian institutions, Turkey’s military has acted as a constitutionalist in uniform, often combining the responsibilities of a constitutional court with those of a head of state.

#### Section V. A Case of Armored Constitutionalism

For the past half-century, Turkey has struggled to consolidate a viable, modernizing, and democratic political system. During this period, the military has dominated Turkish politics, executing four coups over the past half century. Yet at the same time, Turkey has remained committed to a democratic system, never passing more than six years between parliamentary elections. Using history as evidence, I will show that the Turkish military’s role over this period is best viewed as an attempt to build a working democracy, explainable by the armored constitutionalism model.

#### **The Ottoman Roots of Turkish Military Exceptionalism**

It is impossible to understand the powerful role of the Turkish military in modern times without first considering its Ottoman predecessor. As Albert Lybyer explained, the military was the heart of the Ottoman state:

the Ottoman government had been an Army before it was anything else...in fact, Army and Government were one. War was the external purpose, Government the internal purpose, of one institution, composed of

one body of men (Lybyer 1913: 90).

Likewise, Ottoman modernization efforts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century centered on upgrading the military with the help of European advisors. This included giving new cadets the finest education in the Empire. Within a couple of generations, the Ottoman officer class completely outpaced society in Western outlook and political ferment. Circles within the military became obsessed with reforming the decadent Ottoman government and bringing society into modernity. As a result, the military became, as Dankwart Rustow observed, “Turkey’s foremost modernizer” for the next two centuries (Rustow 1959: 513). Elements of the military<sup>7</sup> led the constitutional revolution in 1908, instituted the secular-nationalist Committee of Union and Progress regime, and founded modern Turkey in 1923 (Zurcher 2004: 93). Owing to these roots, the modern Turkish military is officially portrayed as the progressive standard-bearer of modernity, secularism, and unity in the country. This image is not only spread into society through propaganda, but also is inculcated into the cadets who become the future officers of the Turkish military.

The foundation of modern Turkey itself can be considered, in many respects, to be a military overthrow of the decrepit Ottoman regime. In the wake of World War I, competing centers of power emerged between the Sultan in Constantinople and intact elements of the Ottoman military in Anatolia. The Sultan still theoretically held power, but Allied troops *de facto* controlled the Ottoman capital, Constantinople, while plotting to divide Asia Minor. The holdouts in Anatolia, organized into a nationalist movement by General Mustafa Kemal, first tried to collaborate with the Ottoman government to resist Allied plans. Kemal met in late 1919

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<sup>7</sup> The most radical modernizers came from the Third Army, the division responsible for Ottoman Macedonia, which, at the Western edge of Ottoman Turkey, gave its soldiers both a Western outlook and clear understanding of threats facing the Ottoman state. Its officers included Enver Pasha, the leader of the CUP regime, and Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the founder of modern Turkey.

with the Sultan's representatives in the Black Sea town of Amasya, drafting an agreement to cooperate. However, under British pressure, the Sultan agreed in early 1920 to the *de jure* occupation of Constantinople, the dissolution of Ottoman Parliament, and the arrest of nationalist leaders. The nationalists, feeling betrayed, entered into an effective rebellion against the Sultan (Hale 1994: 61). Kemal's army eventually triumphed against both the Sultan and the Allies, and thus the new military of Turkey was filled with a deep distrust of civilian competence. In official propaganda, the military saved Turkey from backwardness and internal division, proudly bringing the country into modernity. At the same time, Mustafa Kemal recalled how politicization weakened the military during the disastrous Young Turk period, and committed himself to establishing a civilian regime (1994: 312). In this manner, the paradox of Turkish democracy, in which an interventionist military commits itself to civilian rule, was born.

### **Civil-Military Relations in the One-Party State: 1923-1945**

When Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) established modern Turkey in 1923, he declared the new country to be a civilian republic. Although that was certainly the goal, the reality was different. The country was a wasteland of discredited institutions and devastated populations. The only source of popular legitimacy in the country was the military, which was exalted after its victory in the "War of Independence"—the expulsion of the Allies and defeat of the Greeks in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-22 (Karabelias 2000: 131). Furthermore, the military was the most progressive, educated, and secular segment of society, making it the only really viable scaffolding for creating a modern state.

Considering the circumstances, Kemal placed trusted officers into the most important administrative posts, and gave many commanders dual roles as governors, especially in the

frontier provinces. Men with military backgrounds comprised one-fifth of the new parliament (Brown 1989: 387). As Frederick Frey observed, despite the “technically civilian” character of Atatürk’s regime, “persons conditioned by military experience, accessible to military contacts and trusted by military personnel” staffed the bureaucracy (Frey 1966: 7-8). In theoretical terms, the Kemalist regime most closely resembles Nordlinger’s “ruler type” of regime, because of its “exceptionally ambitious” political, social, and economic ambitions, and the lack commitment to real elections (Nordlinger 1977: 26-27).

### **The Problems of the Two-Party State: 1950-1960**

Former general and then President İsmet İnönü, as part of a bid to join NATO and integrate Turkey with the West, began transitioning to a multiparty system in 1945, and allowed Turkey’s first fair multiparty elections in 1950 (Karpas 1959). The Democrat Party (DP) swept elections, defeating the Republican People’s Party (RPP), which, after having ruled Turkey for all of the previous twenty-seven years, left power without much difficulty. The most striking difference between the DP regime and the prior one was, according to Erik Zürcher, the “virtual absence of representatives with a bureaucratic and/or military background” (2004: 221). The opening of Turkish politics, the removal of the military from the daily affairs of state, and the peaceful transfer of power to a new class provided the first real test of the 1924 constitution—which had been a mostly symbolic document during the one-party period.

The 1924 constitution failed in this test, creating instead a thoroughly unworkable system. It placed sovereignty in an unchecked parliament, and apportioned seats to the parliament in a manner that created grossly oversized majorities. Thus, although the DP only won a slight majority in the 1950 elections, taking 53% of the votes, it garnered a supermajority

in parliament, taking 408 of 487 seats. The RPP, which was now the main opposition party, faced the opposite situation. In the 1954 elections, for instance, despite gaining over one-third of the popular vote, the RPP received only 5.6 percent of the seats in parliament, making a large part of the electorate feel cheated by the system (Sayari & Esmer 2002: 58). These huge majorities gave the DP enough to power to change the constitution at will, infuriating the opposition. No constitutional court existed to strike down laws, and no second chamber oversaw legislation (Zürcher 2004: 222). The parliament even elected the president. Unfettered by constitutional checks, and having matured under a one-party state, the DP took its popular mandate as a license to rule Turkey in an authoritarian fashion.

DP rule was highly successful for its first few years, riding an economic boom. But boom turned to bust in the middle of the decade, and the DP responded by borrowing from the Central Bank—essentially printing money. This created inflation, and as the economy weakened further, the DP turned to authoritarianism to silence opposition: It enacted a bevy of laws to persecute opposition journalists, restrict freedom of assembly, and exclusively control state telecommunications (Reich 1990: 337). To remove Kemalists from government, Menderes passed laws giving his government free reign to fire bureaucrats, and instituted a retroactive requirement of mandatory retirement after twenty-five years of service, helping to rid himself of the old generation of civil servants.

The DP's authoritarianism increased throughout the 1950s, as did tensions within society. During negotiations with Greece over Cyprus in 1955, Menderes's government planned anti-Greek demonstrations in Istanbul, and instructed the police not to interfere. This devolved into a horrific pogrom against the Greek community in Istanbul, with Turks bused in from Anatolia ransacking Greek businesses and homes. After the opposition accused Menderes of fraud in the

1957 elections, the country entered into what Nur Yalman describes as a “state of civil war without actual hostilities” (1968: 132). In the context of a political situation that was spiraling out of control, the DP began appealing to Islamic sentiments in the provinces to shore up support. In one 1958 speech, for instance, Menderes boasted that his party “accepted religious teaching in schools...[and] had the Koran recited over the radio. Turkey is a Muslim state and it will remain so” (quoted in Yücekok, 1971: 90). This declaration contradicted Turkey’s identity as a secular state, codified by Atatürk in the 1937 amendments to the constitution.

Increasingly unhinged, the DP began using the military against the opposition. In early 1960, Menderes ordered the Army to block opposition leader İsmet İnönü from holding a political rally in a provincial city. İnönü was a former general and Turkey’s second president. Next, Menderes appointed an extraordinary commission to conduct a three-month closed-door investigation of the opposition, declaring all political activity banned in the meantime. When law professors denounced the commission as unconstitutional, the government censured the professors, sparking riots in the universities of Istanbul and Ankara throughout May 1960. In response, Menderes ordered the Army to shut down the universities. On May 27<sup>th</sup>, the military arrested the Menderes government, closed down the Democrat Party, and began preparing constitutional reforms. The military carried out the intervention because the system had collapsed; the military’s goal was to create a new democratic system that would be protected from another descent into authoritarianism.

### **Restructuring the State: The 1960 Coup and its Aftermath**

The 1960 coup regime suffered from many of the flaws familiar to juntas. It banned domestic criticism of its actions, initiated a legally dubious trial of the Menderes’s government,

and ultimately executed Menderes for violating the constitution. Still, within boundaries, the junta reaffirmed its commitment to the principle of popular sovereignty. Its members took an oath in the parliament to return Turkey to normal parliamentary life at the “earliest opportunity” through national elections. The high command expelled officers who argued for a return to the one-party state (Yalman 1968, 133-36). This included one of the coup’s primary instigators, Alparslan Türkeş, who went on to have a major role in Turkish politics in the 1970s as the leader of Turkish fascism. Radical officers led by Talat Aydemir attempted two unsuccessful counter-coups that also heightened the military’s desire to return power to civilian rule, as it feared that political involvement was undermining its unity (Hale 1994: 314).

The military’s primary goal was to create a sturdier, multi-party democracy that was insulated from authoritarianism, leading Ergun Özbudun to label the 1960 coup “reformist” (1966: 21). To create a new constitution with checks and balances, the junta organized a half military, half civilian constituent assembly. This assembly appointed a committee of law professors to draft a new constitution, which the assembly eventually ratified as the 1961 Turkish Constitution. This constitution, considered the most liberal in Turkey’s history, created an independent constitutional court and an upper house of parliament to review legislation. It threw out the old majoritarian system for apportioning parliamentary seats in favor of proportional representation based on d’Hondt’s largest average formula (Sayari & Esmer: 59). The constitution gave society strong guarantees of civil liberties, including protection of the universities and the media from government interference. To harmonize civil-military tensions and prevent the need for future coups, the junta created a National Security Council, or NSC, composed of both military and civilian members. The military, fearful of Menderes’s exploitation of Islamic sentiments of the peasantry, also took steps to propagate a modernized

form of Islam, giving preachers secular education and publishing “enlightened” sermons (Zürcher 2004: 247).

Finally, the military had the parliament appoint General Cemal Gürsel president, and from this point forward the Armed Forces played an informal but key role in choosing future presidents. Elections in 1961, which included eleven new parties, returned power to civilians, but failed to produce a clear winner, and for the next four years the military helped politicians form government coalitions. True civilian rule did not return until 1965, when the Justice Party led by Süleyman Demirel, the successor to the Democrat Party, won a majority.

### **The Military Tries Again: The Coup of 1971**

The Demirel government brought stability to Turkish politics for a few years, but the system began to show signs of instability in 1970. The checks against authoritarian government had instead created ineffective government. Anti-system parties took advantage of proportional representation to hold the major parties hostage, while extremists used the protections of civil liberties to foster political violence. Fringe parties created an ideologically charged environment that was even less amenable to compromise. A new militant left caused disturbances on the street and in the universities, which were countered and soon surpassed by the Grey Wolves, a new fascist militia tied to Alparslan Türkeş’s Nationalist Action Party (NAP). Demirel’s center-right government was unable to stem the far-right violence, partially because proportional representation required it to rely on far-right parties to stay on power. In 1971, the military’s high command issued a memorandum explaining that it was unhappy with increasing radicalization, and Demirel resigned. The military was forced to act in order to preempt a breakaway faction of

radical officers from executing a coup. After the military regained control of the situation, it purged the disobedient officers (Ahmed 1977: 292).

The military organized a technocratic government to push through reforms, and declared martial law in eleven provinces after terrorists kidnapped and killed the Israeli Consul in Istanbul. Deeming recent governments too weak and civil society too reckless, officers again tinkered with the constitution to try to attain the right balance. New amendments placed restrictions civil liberties, ended autonomy of universities and telecommunications, and weakened the constitutional court (Sakallıoğlu-Cizre 1993: 111-119). The government granted more power to the NSC, and created new state security courts that bypassed the judiciary. During this period, the military advised the government while it arrested agitators—mostly leftists. Yet the government did not rule by decree, rather it had to obtain a majority in parliament (Zürcher 2004: 260). Eying the drop in legitimacy across the Aegean Sea that the Greek junta faced at this time, the military preferred to stay out of day-to-day governance, and allowed free elections to take place in October 1973. This shows that the military was sufficiently attuned to the dangers of politicization to make it fear holding on to the actual reigns of power.

The constitutional fixes put in place after the 1971 coup proved insufficient for stemming the tide of political violence, or for fostering effective government. Unable to combat the oil shocks of the 1970s, successive coalition governments recklessly printed money, causing inflation to hit 90 percent by the end of the decade (Zürcher 2004: 268). Political violence also increased rapidly. In 1977, unknown gunmen killed thirty-nine people during May Day protests in Taksim Square, Istanbul's equivalent of Times Square. In 1978, Sunni fundamentalists killed hundreds of Kurdish Alevis (a heterodox Islamic group) in the southeastern city of Kahramanmaraş, leading Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, a noted opponent of military

intervention, to declare martial law. Thousands more died in political violence over the next two years, including the murders of elite politicians and journalists. In an event symbolic of the growing anarchy in Turkey, the mayor of Fatsa declared his Black Sea town to be an independent Soviet republic (Dodd 1980: 24).

Meanwhile, the polarized political elite was increasingly unable to accomplish anything. Parliament, after over six months and a hundred rounds of voting, remained unable to agree on a replacement to the outgoing president. Ecevit and Demirel, the leaders of the two centrist parties whose cooperation could have given Turkey effective government, despised each other, engaging in what C. H. Dodd called “mutual delegitimation” (1980: 43). JP leader Demirel described Ecevit’s RPP as an “enemy of the regime” bent on advancing “socialism and collectivism,” and refused to even address Ecevit as Prime Minister. The RPP, in turn, suggested that the JP was trying to turn Turkey into a fascist state (Özbudun 2000: 41-2). The last straw for the military was a massive Islamist rally in favor of *shariah* law led by Necmettin Erbakan on September 6<sup>th</sup>, with the backdrop of an Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran. The military seized power in September 12<sup>th</sup> of that year.

### **Back to the Drawing Board: The Coup of 1980**

The 1980 coup regime behaved ruthlessly, executing tens of thousands of people, arresting over 100,000 more, and committing widespread torture. It closed down every political party in Turkey, even Atatürk’s RPP, and jailed their leaderships. Yet, the coup’s focus was not to profit the military, but to again attempt to create a viable political system based on electoral democracy. The reason for the brutality was that this time Turkey’s military decided that in addition to a broken political system, society was also a cause of Turkey’s political problems.

The military again created a constituent assembly, which appointed professors to write a new constitution. In an effort to keep out extremist parties, the new 1982 constitution erected a 10% vote barrier to parliament, with proportional representation for parties that cleared this hurdle (Sayari & Esmer 2002: 61). To make it easier to crack down on extremists, the constitution restricted certain civil liberties. Lastly, the new constitution increased the military's oversight by strengthening the NSC and the presidency, with the added condition that the next president be the coup leader, General Kenan Evren.

To counter ideological polarization, the military eliminated left-wing elements, essentially committing Turkey to neo-liberal economic policies, while making ideological concessions to the right, including increasing the glorification of Atatürk and adding state-sanctioned Islamic courses to the national school curriculum. It tried to engineer a new political system in advance of the 1983 elections, appointing a retired general to lead a center-right party, and a government bureaucrat to lead a center-left party. Both were humorless functionaries loyal to the military/Kemalist state. The coup regime permitted only one civilian party to compete—the Motherland Party (MP) led by former JP economic minister Turgut Özal. Özal won a big victory—proof that the Turkish people wanted civilian government—and the military allowed it, proof that it ultimately respected popular sovereignty.

By the force of his personality and talent for patronage, Özal dominated Turkish politics until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1993. He succeeded with the same basic coalition of big business, Islamists, and hardline nationalists/fascists that Demirel was unable to make in the early 1970s, and restored national politics to normalcy by 1986. The major exception was in the southeast of Turkey, where the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a Marxist-Leninist Kurdish nationalist group founded in 1978, launched a terror campaign against the military. In an effort to

combat the PKK, martial law and human-right abuses continued in southeast throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The military worried about the increasing Islamicization of Turkish politics under Özal's government, and tried to press Özal to pass anti-Islamist reforms, but Özal ignored these pleas (Jenkins 2001: 60-62).

### **The Military Intervenes Again: The Coup of 1997**

Years of political breakdowns and coups left Turks without strong party affiliations, and a number of high-profile corruption scandals in the 1990s created a cynical electorate. The Islamist Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan, untainted by scandal and buffeted by strong grassroots organization, won municipal elections before winning a plurality of 21 percent in the parliamentary elections in 1995. The military, shocked into action, prodded other parties to form a coalition and prevent Welfare from taking power, but this proved unworkable because of elite scandals. Erbakan eventually became Prime Minister in 1996. He began his premiership with controversial trips to Tehran, Cairo, and Tripoli. The military, alarmed that Turkey's secular identity was under threat, published a memorandum outlining eighteen "recommendations" for policymaking for the government to adopt, based on existing laws, to curb Islamism (Cook 2007: 125). It was similar to the recommendations that Özal had ignored. The policies in the memorandum contradicted Erbakan's platform, and he resigned. The judiciary, galvanized by the military, closed his party soon after. Amongst other actions, the judiciary also tried and imprisoned the popular Welfare mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for reciting an allegedly Islamist poem at a political rally.

## **The 2000's—A New Beginning or a Return to the 1950s?**

In the 2002, a group of moderates from Welfare, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP). AKP proclaimed a new commitment to secularism and won the 2002 elections. AKP won another big victory in the 2007 elections. For the first time since Özal, Turkey has had a stable government with successful economic growth. Through the European Union accession process and associated democratization reforms, AKP has strengthened civilian power over the military. However, the opposition is unproven, and the AKP retains authoritarian tendencies—including hostility towards noncompliant media, and infiltration of the police with political sympathizers. It is keen towards populism—increasing parliamentary power and making the presidency popularly elected—because it knows that it is the best-organized party in Turkey. The military blocked the nomination of Abdullah Gul to the presidency in 2007 and tried to close AKP in 2008 for undermining secularism. However, AKP called a snap election, won a larger parliamentary majority, and the military backed down in the face of popular support for AKP. Despite the success of the AKP and the desire for democracy, many Turks fear that aside from the military, true constitutional checks on power remain underdeveloped. Thus, Turkey's unique experiment with democracy continues.

## **Conclusions About the Turkey's Civil-Military Relations**

Over the past 60 years, Turkey's military has shown itself to be what Gareth Jenkins calls a “reluctant interventionist” (2001: 57). It prefers taking “negative” actions—stopping others—rather than making policies itself. In this manner, it is taking some of the function of a constitutional court, one of Turkey's underdeveloped civilian institutions. When it has taken

direct action, it was in an emergency situation, such as the two periods of democratic collapse in 1960 and 1980. The military aims to protect Turkey's founding identity as a secular republic, and to form ground rules for electoral politics that allow for Turkey to function as a democracy. By doing so, Turkey's military has acted as an armored constitutionalist, primarily concerned with keeping the democratic system functioning working within the bounds that Turkey pre-committed to under Atatürk.

Over the long term, Turkey's military interventionism should be seen as a symptom of Turkey's democratic deficit, rather than its cause. Without the military interventions, it is likely that Turkey would have succumbed to civil war and/or one party rule. This indeed has been the history of nearly all of Turkey's neighbors, which form a "crescent of instability" from the Balkans to the Caucasus, with the Middle East in between (Hadar et al., 2003: 1). The past sixty years have been stormy for the region, while Turkey's military has helped to keep the country stable and out of regional conflict. During times of effective civilian government, such as the Özal and Erdoğan periods, the military has ceased to be the dominant player in politics. In many ways, the judiciary's decision to not close down AKP in 2008 was a watershed in Turkish civil-military relations, and is proof of the growing restraints against military intervention created by modernization effects.

#### Section VI. Is the Turkish Military Really an Armored Constitutionalist?

The armored constitutionalism model rests on the foundation that Turkey's military has focused on guarding the secular republican character of the democratic polity, and has worked to revive it during collapse. There are numerous possible counterarguments that conflict with this model. An alternative reading of history might portray the military as a partisan actor, working

for the RPP elite. Another argument might show the military as an essentially self-interested actor, preoccupied with advancing itself in both monetary and political terms. While convincing at first, neither argument stands up against closer scrutiny.

The most convincing argument against the armored constitutionalist model is the idea that Turkey's military has been simply worked to keep the Kemalist urban elite in power, while keeping the religious conservatives of Anatolia out of power. This is the model that Samuel Huntington uses for Turkey in his landmark work *Political Order in Changing Societies*, stating that as society modernizes, the "progressive the role of its military" gives way to a more "conservative and reactionary" outlook concerned with protecting the elite status quo (Huntington, 1968: 221). Turkey's most celebrated political scientist, Şerif Mardin, similarly argued that Turkish politics is best viewed on a center-periphery axis, in which the Kemalist elite, occupying the "center" and protected by the military, imposes its values on a "periphery" that is not allowed to take power (Mardin 1973). The "periphery" in modern times refers to the religious Anatolians villagers that opposed secularism and supported the Democrat Party.

This viewpoint is rooted in fact. The 1960 and 1971 coups both brought Atatürk's former party, the Republican People's Party, into power, while the 1997 coup brought Bülent Ecevit, the former RPP leader, into power as Prime Minister. The military is known for its strong stance against Islamists, and it closed down two ruling parties, the Democrat Party and the Welfare Party, in part for allegedly undermining secularism. The military can also be characterized as being prejudiced against the left. It worked assiduously to dismantle leftist groups and support for socialist elements in the population throughout the 1970s, without paying similar attention to fascist groups. After taking power in the 1980 coup, the military took the opportunity to push through neo-liberal reforms. Most damning has been the military's actions against the rights of

Turkey's Kurdish minority, censoring the press and refusing until recently to countenance non-military solutions to Turkey's "Kurdish question".

However, the military's preference for certain groups does not preclude the military from ultimately obeying certain principles. Namely, it has always over time respected popular sovereignty, even when the electorate's decisions overruled the military's preferences. The military has historically preferred the RPP, but it did allow the Justice Party, the successor to the Democrat Party, to return to power after the 1960 and 1971 coups. After the failed attempt in 1983 to create an electoral system with two obedient parties, it allowed the Motherland Party to take power, which, through Özal's roots in the Justice Party, can in many ways be viewed as a continuation of the closed Democrat Party. The military even closed RPP in the aftermath of the 1980 coup. After the closing of Islamist Welfare Party in 1997, more moderate members of the party were allowed to return to power in 2002 as the AKP. Erdoğan, who had been jailed following the 1997 coup for anti-secular activities, was allowed to become prime minister.

In reality, as Berma Turan (2007) argues, the "staunchly secular" Turkish military has engaged moderate Islamists in an effort to constructively handle the political appeal of Islam in Turkey while protecting the state from anti-system parties. The Turkish electorate, in a way, has validated the military's strategy. Erbakan's Welfare Party never received more than 21 percent of the vote, while his new party, Felicity, has polled only 2.5 and 2.3 percent, respectively, in the past two national elections. Meanwhile, the more moderate spinoff from Welfare, the ruling AKP, has polled 34 and 47 percent, respectively, in the same two elections—the first ones in which Turks had a choice between Welfare and a more moderate Islamist party.<sup>8</sup> Although the Turkish military's desire to close down the Islamist AKP fits Huntington's observations about

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.belgenet.net/> for a breakdown of Turkish electoral results over the past fifty years. Accessed 04/08/10.

the reactionary role of military in advanced society, this ignores the role of modernization effects. Military interventions in Turkey today, at a time when Turkey is rising on the world stage and its economy is relatively strong, are much harder than before. This contributed to the military's failure to close down AKP through a "judicial coup" in 2008, something unimaginable in the past.

The military's historical actions against leftists have been partisan, and lack the constitutional basis that the military's efforts against Islamists have. One of the precepts of Atatürk's founding ideology was statism, which was unceremoniously discarded in the privatizations following the 1980 coup (Parla and Davidson, 2004). The military has similarly discriminated against Kurds, in addition to Islamists and leftists, two groups that are relatively sympathetic towards Kurdish rights. Yet, Turkey's military was acting against leftism in the context of the Cold War, and it did try to incorporate some ideas from the left, including pushing through land reforms during the 1971 coup. As for the Kurds, it is not clear that civilian authorities would have been any more sympathetic in the absence of military pressure. In recent years, the military has acknowledged the need for other strategies to handle Turkey's Kurdish problem, acquiescing to the AKP's new policy of Kurdish "opening." This is a policy of granting Kurds some ethnic rights, but it has come to a standstill due to public opposition.

Another major alternative argument explains Turkey's military as an essentially self-interested actor. The military has typically taken a major role in choosing Turkey's presidents, with nearly half being former generals. The 1960 and 1980 constitutions, written at the military's behest, also both expanded greatly the military's power. The military enjoys little oversight over its budget, and has acquired sizable investments through the Güçlendirme Vakfı (a military pension fund) and OYAK bank. It temporarily blocked some IMF reforms at the start

of the 2000s (Cook 2007: 21). Although scholarly investigations on the subject are scarce, there is evidence that the military profited from privatization during the 1980s.

All public institutions fight to strengthen their positions and maximize their budget, so there is no way to claim that Turkey's military will not maximize its own self-interest. But it is unfair to say that this is its main goal or motivation. There is no clear monetary reward for advocating secularism and nationalism that could not be obtained from advocating Islamism. Moreover, as Turkey's economy stabilized in the 2000s, the military has become increasingly less involved in economic affairs, and it sold the OYAK Bank in 2007. It accepted EU accession reforms that reduced its institutional power. Furthermore, militaries that focus on solely on political power and economic advancement typically lose morale and get caught in corruption scandals. Yet, the Turkish military's morale remains high, and by all reports suffers from relatively low corruption, certainly much less than the civilian government<sup>9</sup>.

## Section VII: Conclusions

Karl Marx famously claimed that, “[the] more developed country presents to the less developed country a picture of the latter's future.” However, as Alexander Gershenkron noted, has this is only half true: “A backward country may, by the very virtue of its backwardness, tend to differ fundamentally from that of an advanced country [in its development]” (Gershenkron, 1992: 122). Both scholars were referring to economic development, but the same concept is applicable to political development (and Marx saw no difference between the two). Ottoman Turkey, by virtue of its backwardness, took a very different route to becoming a democratic

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<sup>9</sup> See Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index. Turkey is tied with Cuba: [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table) Accessed 03/08/10.

republic than did its predecessors. This is not a development explained well by other models, but it is understandable through the armored constitutionalist model.

Additionally, Turkey is an outlier in having (so far) successfully reconciled Islam and democracy. It has done so over a longer period, with better results and fewer curbs on freedom, than any other Muslim majority country. Understanding how Turkish democracy works therefore also offers lessons for how states in the Middle East might develop if and when they transition to democracy. They will have to test real constitutions for the first time, and they will need buffers to protect their states from Islamism. These states are likely to develop institutions foreign to traditional democracies. Some of their leaders will look to Turkey for a guide. Academics should too.

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