

THE 2016 COUP ATTEMPT IN TURKEY: A RESULT OF CHANGING CIVIL-MILITARY BALANCE IN TURKEY

Abstract

In 2016 Turkey made headlines with yet another coup, however, this time with an unsuccessful outcome. While there were many similarities with previous coups, there were also major differences. After the failed coup, people showed unprecedented support for the civilian government. Military commanders of different units made statements assuring their loyalty to the civilian government. Although purges, martial law and arrest followed the coup attempt, which was nothing new after a military intervention, this time roles had been reversed. It was the civilian government which purged the military and removed unwanted people. The paper argues that the 2016 military coup attempt failed as the military's political power had been weakened following reforms implemented under the demand of the EU in the 2000s. There was also obvious fragmentation in the military as only one faction participated in the plot.

Keywords: *civil-military relations, coup attempt, fragmentation*

Introduction

Military coups, coup d'états and military interventions in politics are nothing new for Turkey. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 there have been five successful interventions by the military in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 and 2007 as well as a few failed attempts to intervene into politics. Whenever the civilian government failed to maintain stability in the country and whenever there was an attempt to deviate from the principles of Kemalism and secularism the Turkish military intervened to reestablish the order that they thought served the national interest of the Turkish people best. As the military had an important role in the establishment of the Turkish Republic the military took the protection of the national interest upon themselves. By describing to themselves the role of guardians of secularism and Kemalism the military saw coups as legitimate interventions. After each intervention, the military's political position was further strengthened. One important lever of influence under

the military was the National Security Council which made policy recommendations concerning almost every aspect of life in Turkey. As Turkey showed aspirations for EU membership the strong presence of the military in Turkish politics emerged as a major obstacle which had to be overcome. Since 2001 Turkey has implemented a number of reforms which have significantly decreased the political powers of the military. Nonetheless, 2016 saw another coup attempt in Turkey, again arranged by the military. However, this time things took a different turn as the military intervention ended in failure. It was the government that got to consolidate its power and purge the military. The paper will describe how the 2016 coup was different from the previous ones. Two hypotheses will be directing the path of the study:

H1: Turkey's aspirations to join the EU enabled the civilian government to gain more control over the political sphere through reforms.

H2: Fragmentation in the Turkish military led to the failure of the coup.

Literature Review

Historically, the military had an established role, to protect the security of a given country from external threat. Throughout centuries the military institution became more complex and more accomplished. The post-World War II period saw a number of military interventions in the political life of many established as well as emerging states. Even in democracies like the United States, a need was felt to balance relations between the military and civilian authorities. It is widely believed that in democracies the civilian government has control over the military. However, in some cases it is the military which has control over the civilian government, like in Cuba, Iraq during Saddam Hussein, Turkey etc. Thus the study of Civil-Military Relations (henceforth CMR) emerged, as there was a need to explain the new conditions between the militaries and civilian authorities of numerous states. The relationship between the military and the civilian authorities becomes a dichotomy as the main challenge lies in the following: how to establish a military which is strong enough to protect the society from external threat, but which will at the same time accept authorization from the civilian government.¹

For a long time the civil-military field of studies has been dominated by the theories of Samuel Huntington. Huntington believed that a professional army would never intervene in the political life of a state. The more

¹ Peter Feaver, "The civil-military problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the question of civilian control," *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 149.

the military approaches the professional ideal the stronger and more effective it is in its performance, however, once it falls short of that ideal the military becomes weak and flawed. Huntington established that civilian control is concerned with the relative power between civilian and military groups, which means civilian control is achieved through the reduction of military power. Thus the main problem of civilian control is to minimize the power of the military. Huntington distinguishes between subjective and objective civilian control. Subjective civilian control entails maximizing civilian power which seems to be the simplest way of minimizing military power. Objective civilian control is directly opposed to subjective civilian control and postulates the emergence of professional attitudes and behavior among the members of the officer corps. Hence, it entails maximizing military professionalism. Objective military control entails the existence of autonomous military professionalism contrary to subjective military control which supposes denial of an independent military. Under objective civilian control minimization of military power is achieved by professionalizing the military and thus by making them politically neutral. Peter Feaver also states that the civil-military challenge is to find mitigation between a military which is strong enough to carry out the orders of civilian authorities and a military with enough will to act under civilian oversight.² When analyzing Huntington's subjective and objective civilian control models, Feaver claims that the latter's dichotomous model needs at least one additional category, which is assertive control that considers the coexistence of civilian supremacy and military professionalism.³ He also questions Huntington's claim that professionalism equals subordination. He claims that militaries which could be described as professional by most criteria have still conducted coups and otherwise intervened into politics.

Samuel Finer challenges Huntington's professionalism theory, arguing that only the acceptance of civil supremacy will hinder the military to intervene in civilian politics. He claims that Huntington's theory is based on a very specific definition of professionalism. If soldiers act differently than this special definition of professionalism, then they are deemed as unprofessional. However, there are instances when a professional army, such as the German and Japanese armies, has intervened into politics.⁴ Hence a narrow conceptualization of professionalism does not solve the civil-military problem. Finer argues that the very nature of professionalism often throws the military into conflict with civilian authorities. If the

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 163.

⁴ Samuel Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The role of the military in Politics*, (Routledge, 2017), 25.

military regards its occupation as a profession they may be drawn to think of themselves as the servants of the state rather than that of the incumbent civilian government. This kind of reasoning may lead the military to intervene in political affairs whenever they judge the civilian leaders to be acting contrary to national interest.⁵

Feaver also states that traditionally CMR has focused on the direct seizure of political power by the military, which is the coup. Coups are the traditional focus of civil-military relations because they symbolize the main problem: the military exploiting their ability to use violence to displace a civilian government. A coup may indicate military strength as well as weakness. A military which carries out a coup may seem strong compared to other political actors. However, a coup also indicates the military's inability to achieve its goals through political means.⁶ Feaver argues that the frequency and success rates have fallen which indicates important changes in the nature of civil-military relations over time. Like Feaver and Finer other authors also take a critical approach on Huntington's theory of professionalism. Some authors claim that CMR need reconsideration especially after the end of the Cold War and the spread of democratization that followed. Douglas Bland proposes a theory of shared responsibility between the military and civilian authorities. His main thesis is that civilian leaders and military officers should share the responsibility of asserting civilian control over the military.⁷ James Burk also argues that a new CMR theory needs to address the modern problems among the two entities. He claims that the traditional role of the military has changed and that nowadays the military should be an instrument for protecting and sustaining democratic values within and beyond the nation state.⁸ David Albright also argues that it is important to stop thinking about the military and civilian authorities as two dichotomous terms. If sometimes conflict does exist in civil-military relations in specific countries, it is not necessarily the case at all times for all states. The cooperative or adversary nature of CMR in a given country depends on the level of cooperation or antagonism between the civilian and military authorities of that country. If the line distinguishing between military and civilian authorities is blurred there is a great chance that relations will be in a cooperative nature.⁹ Rebecca Schiff is also among the authors who

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ Peter Feaver, "Civil-military relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2.1 (1999): 218.

⁷ Douglas Bland, "A unified theory of civil-military relations," *Armed Forces & Society* 26, no. 1 (1999): 7-25.

⁸ James Burk, "Theories of democratic civil-military relations," *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 1 (2002): 7-29.

⁹ David Albright, "A comparative conceptualization of civil-military relations," *World Politics* 32, no. 4 (1980): 553-576.

reject the dichotomous nature of civil-military relations. She postulates concordance between the two entities. Concordance theory argues that the military, the political elites and the citizenry should opt for cooperation, which may or may not include separation but it is not required.¹⁰ According to her, under concordance military intervention by the military is less likely to occur. Other authors have attempted to rationalize why certain militaries behave the way they behave. According to Amos Perlmutter the dynamics of civil-military relations is related to the specific political system in a given state.¹¹ He describes states in which the military has a say in political procedures as praetorian. However, he does distinguish between historical and modern praetorian states. A typical example of a historical praetorian state is the Roman Empire with its Praetorian Guard. In a modern praetorian state the military could intervene and technically dominate over the executive.¹² Hence, while in some cases the military controls the country directly, in other cases they more act like a watchdog of the civilian government with enough influence to have a say in decision making. Perlmutter claims that when a civilian government is ineffective the executive cannot control the military.¹³

Koonings and Kruijt also claim that the motives for the military to intervene into politics are different and depend on the specific circumstances in a country. They state that “the starting point for the constitution of political armies is the profound identification of the military with the historical foundation and subsequent fate of the nation” which means that the military develops a strong identification with the nation they were meant to defend.¹⁴ In such cases the military takes on the role of the definer and protector of a nation’s national interests. Such behavior and thinking is explained by the fact that the military elite are convinced that the military should define and protect the national interest because of its birthright as well as competence. According to Koonings and Kruijt such thinking is conditioned by the principle of birthright. The military legitimizes their right to intervene into the politics of the nation based on the perception that it has been at the birth of the nation, has participated and sacrificed itself for the creation of the nation-state.

¹⁰ Rebecca Schiff, “Civil-military relations reconsidered: A theory of concordance,” *Armed Forces & Society* 22, no. 1 (1995): 7-24.

¹¹ Amos Perlmutter, “The praetorian state and the praetorian army: Toward a taxonomy of civil-military relations in developing polities,” *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (1969): 382-404.

¹² *Ibid.*, 382.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁴ Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, *Political Armies: The military and nation building in the age of democracy* (Zed Books, 2002), 19.

Theories on civil-military relations in Turkey

Turkey can be described as a classic case of struggle for the civilian government to exercise and maintain control of the military. Koonings and Kruijt mention Turkey as an example of the birthright principle of the military's intervention in civilian life. That is, the military participated in the creation of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk was a military man himself. For that reason the military took upon itself the role of the guardian of the principles and ideology promoted by Ataturk, namely Kemalism and secularism. Perlmutter calls this kind of guardianship by the military praetorian. Sarigil calls it the popular praetorian military, hinting at the popularity of the Turkish military and armed forces among the public.¹⁵ This type of militaries tend to be involved in the political life of the state extensively, however, they act as guardians of the political regime, their actions are more covert than overt and they do not aim to set up a military regime. Nirufel Narli also emphasizes the Turkish military's "role of the army as the defender of Kemalism".¹⁶ Tanel Demirel also argues that CMR should not be regarded as separate entities and should be examined in line with the interactions that take place between those two entities. He argues that it is not only the failure of civilians that the imbalance in CMR in Turkey is towards the military, but the military is not ready to accept the supremacy of civilian authorities due to its perception of itself as the ultimate guardian of the state. He also mentions that Turkish officers did not have extreme praetorian tendencies as they did not favor long-term military control.¹⁷ The autonomy of the Turkish military played a crucial role in impeding civilian control over the officer corps. Umit Cizre Sakallioğlu points out that one of the important features of the Turkish military autonomy is that it accepts the legitimacy of democracy as well as civilian rule. It followed a refined concept of autonomy according to which it exercised control over politicians based on its own ideas. The author infers that the Turkish army is not praetorian as it has not tried to undermine democracy or eliminate civilian authority. The main justification for the military's ability to influence political decision making is based on its guardianship role of the national interest.¹⁸

Nasser Momayezi claims that men of military background not only established the Turkish Republic but also chose the path that the newly

¹⁵ Zeki Sarigil, "Civil-military relations beyond dichotomy: With special reference to Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2011): 265-278.

¹⁶ Nirufel Narli, "Civil-military relations in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000): 107-127

¹⁷ Tanel Demirel, "Soldiers and civilians: the dilemma of Turkish democracy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 1 (2004): 127.

¹⁸ Umit Sakallioğlu, "The anatomy of the Turkish military's political autonomy," *Comparative politics* 29, no. 2 (1997): 153.

established republic would take.¹⁹ Gerassimos Karabelias also states that the military institution of Turkey has been the driver of social, economic and political reforms. Hence, in order to understand CMR in Turkey after the establishment of the Republic, the military's standing in the Ottoman Empire should be examined as well. Although Ataturk included men with military backgrounds in almost all state institutions, he also made sure to create legal barriers so that the military does not get involved in everyday political life. After each military intervention the military did not return power to civilians until it made sure that its desired political environment had been established.²⁰ In an attempt to legitimize military interventions the officers presented it as a forced action for the preservation of democracy.²¹ Moreover, the military postulated that Kemalism and Ataturk's principles are the foundation for Turkey's democracy. Thus by defending Kemalism the military is also ensuring the prevalence of democracy in the country.

Since the Turkish military had a big contribution in the establishment of the Turkish Republic, it prescribed itself the right to protect the republic and the national interest. As Samuel Finer argues, military's which take on the roles of guardians come up with their own understanding of the national interest. In the case of the Turkish military the national interest was understood in line of the principles of Kemalism. A deviation from those principles led to military intervention.

Military Interventions in Turkey

The Turkish military regarded coups as legitimate interventions for the sake of the national interest. The interventions mostly occurred whenever the ruling government failed to maintain stability in the country and diverted from the path desired by the military. After each intervention the generals strengthened the legal ground for them to influence the political processes even more. The military interventions which took place in Turkey must be examined in light with the political, cultural and socio-economic situation in Turkey at that time. Junior officers started to show signs of unrest in the mid-fifties. This coincided with the worsening of the economy in the country and it turned out that the civilian government did not meet up the expectations of the people. Low ranking military of-

¹⁹ Nasser Momayez, "Civil-military relations in Turkey," *International Journal on World Peace* 13, no. 3 (1998): 3-28.

²⁰ Gerassimos Karabelias, "The evolution of civil-military relations in post-war Turkey, 1980-95," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (1999): 130-151.

²¹ Gerassimos Karabelias, "The Military Institution, Atatürk's Principles, and Turkey's Sisyphean Quest for Democracy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2009): 57-69.

ficers started to compare themselves with their NATO counterparts and became aware of their material backwardness. At the same time the business sector was blooming and the junior officers felt even more neglected. Although the Democrats gave the impression that the military was far from neglected, nonetheless it was obvious that the military institution did not top the list of priorities for the government. When inter-party conflict erupted the discontent of the armed forces took a political direction. The officers started to articulate their grievances which were similar to those of the opposition parties. The first coup was carried out on May 27, 1960. When the coup took place there was almost no resistance from troops loyal to the government and the coup was carried out with minimum bloodshed. The aftermath of the coup saw the adoption of a new constitution, the creation of the National Security Council (henceforth, NSC) and the victory of the Justice Party (henceforth JP) and its leader Suleiman Demirel. With the new constitution and the establishment of the NSC the military created for itself more levers to influence politics and in the Justice Party (JP) it sought an ally which would run the country according to the military's notion of national interest. After the coup the army became an autonomous institution and was recognized as the guardian of the new regime it had put to power.²² The new legislation improved the economic standing of the soldiers. Thus the main concern of the military became to sustain the regime rather than to back any political party. Moreover, the military was ready to intervene against any political party if the regime was threatened. The commanders had become a privileged group in the society and did not need to link their interests with that of a certain political party. On the contrary, it was the political parties which needed to link their interests with those of the military.

The next military intervention happened in March, 1971. This intervention was an interesting case as at first it was not clear which faction of the military had control. The military blamed the politicians for the intervention, claiming that the reason behind the intervention was the policies of the government that created social and economic unrest in the country. Demirel resigned without much protest after he received a memorandum from the military. As it turned out later, the intervention took place to prevent a conspiracy which could have resembled the coup of 1960. The intervention of March 12, was a preventive coup d'état which aimed to prevent the actions of radicals, both military and civilian, who wanted to overthrow the government and implement reforms which were demanded by the intellectuals and the society alike. Reforms were opposed by

²² Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish experiment in democracy 1950-1975*, (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1977), 197.

the business sector in Turkey. The reformers wanted more involvement of the state in foreign capital and the private sector saw this as a threat. The commanders could have easily intervened in support of the reforms however they were divided within themselves as some had a stake in the existing regime. It can be stated that the military intervention of March 12, 1971, also known as the coup by memorandum, took place due to fragmentation in the military. While a faction of officers wanted the reforms to be implemented, commanders and generals who had a stake in the existing regime intervened to prevent the reformers' actions.²³ In this case the military intervention was carried out not for the sake of the society, but for the benefit of the military.

Another coup d'état followed in 1980, which can be described as the most significant coup in Turkish history. Towards the end of the 1970s Turkey was facing serious socio-economic challenges, there was an unprecedented rise in terrorism, and Islamic conflict between the Sunni and Alawite communities was on the rise. Thus, although the military had some stake, the 1980 coup was carried out on behalf of the society, rather than the military.²⁴ The army started the operation at 02:00 am on September 12. At first soldiers surrounded the headquarters of the major political parties and organizations, especially those which could show resistance to the military. Party leaders were removed and held in different places until the end of the coup. In a very short time the army was able to take hold of key strategic buildings. They detained prominent political figures with almost no resistance, which means that the coup had been planned in detail. There was also almost no public resistance which means that the society was anticipating the military intervention. At 04:00 am on September 12 the first statement of the NSC was made public, according to which the military had carried out its duty and taken full control over the country for the sake of maintaining unity in the country, avoiding civil war, and saving the reputation of the country.²⁵ The coup d'état was followed by the announcement of martial law in several regions and commanders were appointed to take hold of power. The national assembly was dissolved, political action was prohibited, demonstrations and strikes were forbidden. The NSC which was in charge of governing the country had unlimited powers. On this background the country entered into a transition phase, typical after coups, which lasted around 3 years. The reason was that this time the coup was not carried

²³ Artur Dumanyan, *1980 tvakani razmakan heghashrdjumi Turkiajum. Patcharnery, yntatsqy, hetevanqnery; (in Armenian) [The 1980 coup in Turkey: the causes, process and consequences]*, (Yerevan: VMV-Print, 2016), 90.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 98.

out to eliminate one issue or one party; the coup was carried out because of multi-layered issues in the socio-economic life of Turkey and the military required more time to find solutions for those issues. The military intended to undertake multidimensional changes and only after that return power to the civilians.²⁶ The coup was followed with mass arrests and the first targets were leftists and nationalists. The military aimed to end terrorism in the country and prevent the further emergence of such groups. Left and right radicals were heavily punished and already in October 1980 a number of people were sentenced to death.²⁷ Within two months after the coup 7945 people had been arrested for participation in terrorist actions.²⁸ These actions led to the decline of terrorism, however, it must be mentioned that under the veil of fighting against terror the military was trying to uproot movements which they deemed dangerous for Kemalist Turkey. During the transition period after the coup 1 million 683 thousand people have been interrogated, lawsuits were filed against 650 thousand people 230 thousand of which were arrested. Death penalty was demanded for 7000 people out of which 517 were sentenced to death and 50 people were executed. 388 thousand people were deprived of their passports, 14 thousand people lost their citizenship, 30 thousand people were dismissed from jobs because they were considered “dangerous”, 30 thousand people left the country as political refugees, 23 thousand 677 organizations were forbidden, 3854 professors were dismissed, 171 people died in prisons due to abuse (this is according to official statistics, in reality that number is believed to be 300).²⁹ The purges were mainly directed towards leftist movements, which suffered a massive blow from the military. Thousands of people were sentenced because they “were part of the organization”. Major sanctions were also imposed on the media during the transition period.

As had become usual in Turkey, the 1980 coup was followed by the adoption of a new constitution. The military presented the new constitution in 1982 and it was passed with a referendum. This was one of the main outcomes of the 1980 coup. One of the main features of the 1982 constitution was that it significantly decreased the democratic rights and freedoms. Strikes and lockouts were forbidden. Parties were not allowed to have youth, women’s and similar fractions. Membership age for parties was raised to 21, so was the voting age. These were done in order to keep the youth apolitical. Another important feature of the new constitution was it significantly increased the powers of the president. This was

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

not done without a reason and was meant to strengthen the levers of the military because firstly since 1960 all the presidents have been from the military and secondly with the new constitution for the coming 7 years the president was supposed to be the head of the NSC.

Despite the military's efforts to control the rise of religious sentiments in the country it was not successful. Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist Welfare party gained significant prominence in the 1990s which had an impact on the established civil-military relations in the country. During the 1995 elections the Welfare Party gained a significant percentage of votes and managed to form a coalition government. Erbakan targeted not only the military tutelage but also the western secular ideology. Such actions, of course, would not be tolerated by the military. What followed was the so-called "post-modern coup". During a National Security Council meeting in February 1997 the NSC issued a decision which furthered the demand of the Prime Minister's resignation. This was the end of Erbakan's coalition government. By some authors this is considered to be the last successful military intervention in Turkish history. The younger generation of Islamists learned lessons from the mistakes of politicians like Erbakan. After founding his Justice and Development Party (AKP) rather than confronting the military Recep Erdogan sought ways to drive the military into an institutional exclusion. He presented himself and his party as pro-EU and pro-Westernization and thus sugar coated his negative Islamist image. Erdogan managed to convince the civil society in his democratization agenda which gradually pushed the military out of politics. Although contested, it can be argued that the last successful military intervention took place in 2007. This time the military made a statement on their website regarding the presidential elections of 2007. The candidate who would most likely be elected was pro-Islamist Abdullah Gul won. The statement of the military articulated concerns arguing, that the election of Gul as president was against the secularist ideas of Turkey (BBC). As a result, Gul was not elected during the first voting. The coup is called e-memorandum as the military's statement was exclusively published on their website. As the older generation of pro-Islamist politicians was defeated by the military, representatives of the younger generation, such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan drew lessons from the failure of their predecessors.³⁰

After 2002 Erdogan has won every local and national election and in 2010 he secured a victory on the constitutional referendum. A major step taken towards curbing the influence of the military was the abolishment of immunity for generals. Another major change foresaw trials of

³⁰ Koray Caliskan, "Explaining the end of military tutelary regime and the July 15 coup attempt in Turkey," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 10, no. 1, (2017): 98.

coup plotters in civilian courts. Besides, no civilians would be trialed in military courts anymore. Other changes entailed oversight of the parliament in case of party closures and the enlargement of the constitutional court. The latter amendment enabled the Prime Minister and the President to have room for maneuver and appoint loyal people into the constitutional court.³¹ Among such loyal people were followers of the Fethullah Gulen Movement (henceforth FGM). The movement is named after its founder, Fethullah Gulen, who is considered by some as Turkey's second most powerful man. Gulen and Erdogan were brought together with their shared Islamic ideologies. At his initial stage of coming to power Erdogan used the expertise of FGM members in various spheres to run the country. The AKP and FGM joined efforts to sideline the military and after that was achieved a power struggle erupted between the allies. Many FGM followers were appointed to key positions in the judiciary, which started a massive prosecution against the military. Many officers were accused of plotting a coup, which was followed by arrests of officers and generals. This was the first time in Turkish history that officers were persecuted in civilian courts for planning coups.³² Although most of the accusations were fabricated, the mere fact was nonetheless important as civilian rule was able to prove its strength.³³ The military did not resist and remained silent during these processes. Moreover, in July 2011 the entire senior command of the military resigned including the Chief of the General Staff. During this period many FGM followers were appointed to positions in the civil and military spheres in the country. Under the Ergenekon accusations many officers were trialed, deemed by some as unfairly. This served to further strengthen the civilian government positions over the military. In 2013 the alliance between Gulen and Erdogan seemed to break. Once the common enemy, namely the military, had been weakened there erupted what seemed to be a power fight between the two groups. Erdogan's government turned to the persecution FGM followers. The culmination of the fight between the once allies seems to have been the 2016 July failed coup attempt. There are still many missing links and unclear facts about the coup attempt. The main action of the coup followed the usual plot of arrests of generals and party leaders, takeover of TV stations etc. The major difference was that only a faction of the military participated in the coup plot. Many commanders and generals were quick to announce their loyalty to the government in different parts of Turkey.

³¹ "Can Erdogan Pull It off?," *The Economist*, September 11, 2010, www.economist.com/node/16994644 (accessed March 10, 2018).

³² Caliskan, "Explaining the end of military," 105.

³³ Caliskan, *Ibid.*, 106-107.

The aftermath of the coup was not different from previous coups as it was followed by large-scale purges. The failed coup attempt was used to crack down on anyone who was perceived as pro-Gülen and deemed as unwanted by the government. In the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt around thousands of military officers were detained, judges were removed and detained for their alleged role in the coup on July 16th. Over the week following the coup attempt already 7,500 military officers had been arrested; the number of suspended police officers was about 8,000, and 1,000 were imprisoned; 21,000 teachers lost their teaching licenses and fifteen universities ceased to operate. In addition, a ban was placed on all civil servants and academics to leave the country.³⁴ This situation was ideal for Erdogan to purge the state from the Gülenists, who were once his allies in weakening the political powers of the military. The events of July 15 and its aftermath will have an important and long-lasting impact on civil-military relations.

Upon studying the military interventions in Turkey a certain pattern becomes evident. The military intervened whenever there was instability in the country, whenever any of the principles of Kemalism were threatened and whenever the interests of the military itself seemed to be under attack. In 1960, 1980 and 2016 (although unsuccessful) the military intervened directly with the deployment of soldiers. In 1971, 1997 and 2007 the interventions were indirect and did not cause any clashes. After the interventions of 1960, 1971 and 1980 the military consolidated more power and increased its levers of influence. In terms of the aftermath of coups, in the extent of purges, the 1980 aftermath and 2016 one were similar, albeit revised roles. The further unfolding of events will show whether the pattern has been broken and whether the civilian government has once and for all established control over the military.

EU Reforms and the Military

Although the government of Erdogan cracked down on the military using allegations of coup plots, which by some are considered to be fabricated (at least some of them) more legitimate levers, like reforms prompted by the prospect of EU membership were also used to curb the power of the military. Already in 1997, with Agenda 2000, which was the action plan for preparing the EU for further enlargement, Turkey was singled out among other aspiring countries because of the Turkish military's

³⁴ Francesco Milan, "Turkey: What hides behind a failed coup attempt," *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 4 (2016): 30-31.

profound role in politics. The Turkish military was described as a “deep state” which had been the de-facto ruler of the country.³⁵ Such conditions were not acceptable for a democratic country functioning under the rule of law. Thus the EU demanded that Turkey amend its legislation to curb the political powers of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). In 1999 Turkey became a candidate state for EU membership. Since then it had to implement a number of reforms concerning almost all spheres of life in Turkey. Among those were the reforms concerning civil-military relations. There was hope that with Europeanization the political activism of the Turkish military would be eradicated.³⁶ The reform process was launched in October 2001 aiming at major constitutional amendments.

The reforms had to be carried out in line with the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) which is the Western type of balance of civil military relations and is promoted by the EU as well as NATO. Although there is no customized model of democratic control of armed forces for each individual country there is a general idea what it entails. “Democratic control of armed forces refers to the norms and standards governing the relationship between the armed forces and society, whereby the armed forces are subordinated to democratically-elected authorities and subject to the oversight of the judiciary as well as the media and civil society organizations”.³⁷ The effective democratic control of armed forces entails the following aspects: civilian control, democratic governance, civilian expertise, non-interference in domestic politics, ideological neutrality, minimal role in national economy, effective chain of command, and respect for the rights of military personnel.³⁸ Thus it is assumed that the military has to be an apolitical instituting with no stake in politics or the economy. The military must have a certain degree of internal independence to ensure its proper functionality however it should have no say in the formation of national interest. The military should also stay out of decisions concerning the state budget. Democratic control norms are implemented through a number of mechanisms such as a clear legal framework in which democratic control principles may be embedded in the constitution or the parliament may adopt necessary laws for democratic control, or the creation of institutional mechanisms which ensure that rule of law is respected within the military, development of educational measures which educate the civilian and military societies on civil-military

³⁵ Ünlü Bilgiç, “The military and Europeanization reforms in Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 5 (2009): 804.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Democratic Control of Armed Forces, DCAF Backgrounder, 2008, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/55845/17_bg_dem_control_armed_forces.pdf, (accessed March 12, 2018).

³⁸ Ibid.

relations and the integration of the armed forces within the society as well as the involvement of the security personnel in trainings on democratic values and human rights.³⁹ As Turkey aspired for full membership into the European Union the reforms of the civil-military relations had to be carried out within these lines, which also entailed reforms of the judicial system and governance.

Since 2001 Turkey has shown significant progress on DCAF reforms, which were conditioned by Turkey's desire to join the EU.⁴⁰ In line with DCAF requirements Turkey had to focus on a few major reforms, namely to bring the Chief of General Staff under the oversight of the Defense Minister instead of the Prime Minister, civilian bodies had to consist solely of civilian representatives which excluded the presence of military representatives, the decisions of the Supreme Military Council were to be open to judicial review, an institution of a military ombudsmen with military oversight should be established. The Turkish legislation on civil-military relations has been significantly amended in harmonization with EU norms. Among others, EU demands of democratic control included full parliamentary oversight and control over military expenditure, removal of military representatives from different civil boards as well as the restriction of military court jurisdictions over civilians.⁴¹ From first sight it seemed that the defense budget was appointed and approved by the parliament, however, in reality the parliament had no say in it and just approved the budget presented to them by the military.⁴² In 2003 Parliament authorized the Court of Auditors to audit the accounts of the TAF, including state property. Although the military resisted and for example classified property and the Defense Industry Support Fund were not subject to audit, the fact that the parliament did authorize at least some audit of military funds was an important step towards civilian supremacy.⁴³ Another major criticism of the EU underlined the presence of military members and representatives in civil boards. For example, following the 1980 coup military representatives were appointed to such boards as the Higher Education Council and the Radio and Television Supreme Council. This was done in an attempt to control education and media broadcasts. With reforms carried out between 2003 and 2004 the NSC and Turkish General Staff were deprived of the authorization to appoint members to a num-

³⁹ Bilgiç, "The military and Europeanization reforms in Turkey," 803-824; Aylin Guney and Petek Karatekelioğlu, "Turkey's EU candidacy and civil-military relations: Challenges and prospects," *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no. 3 (2005): 439-462.

⁴⁰ Arzu Güler and Cemal Alpgiray Bölücek, "Motives for reforms on civil-military relations in Turkey," *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 2 (2016): 252.

⁴¹ Bilgiç, "The military and Europeanization," 803-824.

⁴² Bilgiç, *Ibid.*, 805.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

ber of civil institutions. An important aspect of criticism where Turkey secured progress was the application of Military Penal Law to civilians. The military courts had jurisdiction over civilians both in times of war and peace. Through reforms the military courts' jurisdiction over civilians was gradually reduced and in 2006 civilian trials by military courts were finally abolished.

The Turkish National Security Council (NSC) and its influence over Turkish politics was another major concern for the EU. The NSC was established after the 1960 coup with the adoption of the 1961 constitution. The role of the NSC was significantly increased with the adoption of the 1982 constitution after the military intervention of 1980. The NSC is defined in the Constitution as a consultative organ⁴⁴ and if in 1961 its suggestions had an advisory nature, with the 1982 constitutional amendments the recommendations of the NSC became a priority for the Council of Ministers. Moreover, with the 1982 amendments to the constitution the number of civilian members was reduced to five thus creating an equal number of civilians and military members. Although the main task of the NSC is to advise the government on the formulation and implementation of the National Security Strategy its influence was visible on every matter going as far as the organization of educational curricula. Although the recommendations were of advisory nature they had to be considered seriously if not fully implemented. The EU regarded the NSC as the main channel of influence for the military. It was evident that the existence of the NSC provided the grounds for the military and civil roles of the armed forces hence civilianizing the NSC was a priority set by the EU.⁴⁵ Among the reforms, one of the most crucial amendments was done to the NSC. By amending Article 118 of the constitution the number of civilian members was increased on behalf of military ones thus creating a civilian majority in the NSC. Moreover, the decisions of the NSC were limited to mere advice which would be evaluated by the government but would not be regarded as priority. Before the reforms national security and defense were defined rather broadly and the duties of the NSC went well beyond national defense policy. With the implementation of the Seventh Harmonization Package the duties of the NSC were limited. The duties of the Secretariat of the Council (always a member of the military), which supervised implementation of NSC decisions on behalf of the President and the Prime Minister, were also limited as it was stripped of its executive powers. The oversight of implementation was transferred to a Deputy Prime Minister, thus power went from the military to the civilians. The

⁴⁴ Güney and Karatekelioğlu, "Turkey's EU candidacy and civil-military relations," 445.

⁴⁵ Bilgiç, "The military and Europeanization," 803-824.

main duty of the Secretariat became the definition of the agenda of the NSC thus its duties were limited to clerical services. The Prime Minister also gained executive control over certain funds that had been allocated to the NSC. One of the major achievements regarding the civilianization of the NSC was the appointed of a civilian Secretary General of the Council instead of a four-star army general. Although Turkey did not fulfill all reforms proposed by the EU, there were significant changes done to civil-military relations in line with EU reforms as a result of which civilian leadership gained more authority than it ever had previously in the history of the Turkish Republic. The military participated and influenced the reforms demanded by the EU for accession, nonetheless, the reforms did play a role in curbing the powers of the military and strengthening the positions of the civilian government. One major achievement was limiting the powers of the National Security Council. Since its establishment after the 1960 military intervention the NSC had served as one of the main channels of influence for the military.

Findings and Analysis

By creating the role of guardians of secularism and Kemalism for itself, the Turkish military had in a way legitimized military interventions as a way to restore order in the country. Whenever, according to them the civilian leaders diverted from the right path, the military intervened to restore order and stability. As a result since the establishment of the Turkish Republic the military has had five successful interventions, a few unsuccessful ones and the latest failed coup of 2016. Since the 1960s there have always been factions in the military which have sought to sort matters through military intervention. There have been abortive coups in the 1960s where younger officers have tried to intervene but older generals have been able to hold them back. During previous coups, generals who did not wish to participate in the interventions would keep solidarity and not inform civilian leaders about coup plots. The 2016 failed coup, although similar to the previous ones in the way it was carried out and the in what followed afterward, was different in essence. The style of the coup did not differ much from the previous ones. However, the main difference between the 2016 and previous coups was that not only a small faction within the military participated in the coup. The remaining factions showed their support for Erdogan's government and took action against coup plotters. The plotters may have hoped that their move might ignite a spark and other officers would join the coup, as they had

declared themselves as hardline Kemalists.⁴⁶ However, the coup did not attract other officers, moreover, the public did not welcome the intervention either. Erdogan's supporters stormed the streets after Erdogan's call to take to the streets and even secularists saw the intervention as an attack against democracy. If the accusations of Erdogan are correct and the coup was plotted by followers of Gulen, then it can be concluded that Kemalist officers and generals stayed loyal to the government. If accusations are wrong and Fethullah Gulen did not stand behind the failed coup, it means that either the Kemalist ideology has weakened in the military or there was no unity among the Kemalists officers. It is evident that the majority of the military did not see an intervention as a means to sort issues. With the purges which have been taking place in Turkey since Erdogan came to power many of his supporters were appointed to positions within the military. While the aftermath of the 1980 coup was unprecedented with the extent of purges organized by the military the aftermath of the 2016 coup may be similar in its extent. However, if after 1980 the military used the occasion to declare martial law and eliminate everyone who presented a danger for the order that the military preferred, this time the roles were reversed. Erdogan and his government used the occasion to serve their own interest. An emergency situation was declared and thousands of officers were detained with the accusation of participating in the coup plot. The purges have not stopped yet in Turkey. The failed coup attempt was used by the government to crack down on Erdogan's enemies be they coup plotters, Gulenists or supporters of the Kurdish cause.

The unfolding of the coup and its failure proved the army in general stayed loyal to the civilian leadership, which means that the balance of civil-military relations in Turkey had shifted towards civilians. The reforms carried out under the flag of Europeanization played an important role in curbing the powers of the military. Although reforms were not fully implemented and some were carried out under the direct influence of the military⁴⁷ nonetheless, the positions of the military were significantly weakened. The EU Commission's 2008 progress report on Turkey states that the military still has significant political power in Turkey, however, the following reports, that of 2008, 2009 and 2010 state that progress has been made in civilian oversight of the military. The achievement mentioned is the abolishment of trials of civilians in military courts as well as subjecting decisions of the Supreme Military Council to judicial review. The arrangements made for high-ranking officers to be tried by civilian

⁴⁶ Jonathan Stevenson, "Turkey: The Attempted Coup and Its Troubling Aftermath," *Strategic Comments* 22, no. 5 (2016): 2.

⁴⁷ Bilgiç, "The military and Europeanization," 803-824; Güney and Karatekelioğlu, "Turkey's EU candidacy and civil-military relations," 439-462.

courts were also stated as progress. The 2011 report states the oversight of the military expenditures as progress. The 2015 report states the following in regards to Turkey's progress on civilian oversight over the military "The situation in this area remained stable, without undue interference in politics by the military. Civilian oversight of the law enforcement duties of the gendarmerie was widened. The military and intelligence services lack accountability in parliament".⁴⁸ One of the main accents of Erdogan was the weakening of the NSC under the EU reforms. The number of civilian members was increased on behalf of military members, the Secretary General of the Council was chosen from the ranks of civilians rather than amongst generals and the decisions of the NSC were given an advisory status and were not regarded as mandatory. The duties of the NSC were also limited to defense and security policies, thus the NSC could not exercise influence in every aspect of social life in Turkey anymore.

The reforms had another result which indirectly contributed to the weakening of the military's political power. With the reforms the strict ban on religious practices was lifted, adherents of Islam were not suppressed anymore which weakened the public support of the military. Up until the 90s whenever there was political instability in the country the society expected the military to intervene and restore order. The fact that thousands of people took to the streets in support of Erdogan proves that the military did not enjoy the public support it ones used to. The failure of the coup can be attributed to the weakening of the military under the EU promoted reforms and the fragmentation in the Turkish military. On the eve of the coup plot the civil-military balance had shifted in the country. And as only a faction of the military participated in the coup plot, the civilians were able to take control of the situation as the core of the military was under their control.

Conclusion

At first sight the 2016 July coup attempt may not seem very different from previous coups. It followed the usual plot of coups; official buildings were seized, generals were abducted, an announcement was made on the main TV channel and adherence to Kemalism and secularism was emphasized. Despite the similarities there were also start differences. Only a faction of the military participated in the plot limited to a group from the

⁴⁸ EU Commission, *Turkey 2015 Report*, November 10, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf (accessed March 15, 2018).

air force and ground forces. The bigger part of the military which did not participate in the coup stayed loyal to the government and intervened on behalf of the latter. An unprecedented number of people took to the street to show their support for the government. Regardless of the coup plotters were supporters of Gulen or not, the military did not act as a unitary entity. The purges that followed the failed coup were also similar to those of previous ones. In its extent it was in particular similar to the aftermath of the 1980 coup. However, this time roles had been reversed. The government was the one arranging a purge in the military. The arrests in regards to the coup attempt of 2016 continue to this day.

The paper proved that as a result of EU reforms and fragmentation in the Turkish military the political power of the armed forces was significantly weakened. This fact played a major role in the unsuccessful finish of the coup plot. Future research should also consider the role of leadership in Turkey and how Erdogan's role as a leader impacted the outcome of the coup. The emergence of a pro-Islamic supporter base for Erdogan should also be considered. Another major factor which should be paid attention upon for further research is whether Turkish ideology towards the military and national identity has undergone changes.