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RETHINKING CIVIL AND MILITARY SOCIETY: THE CASE OF TURKEY DURING THE COUP D'ÉTAT ATTEMPT 15 JULY 2016



Abstract: Understanding the relationship between civil-military relations plays a crucial role in the discipline of political science but most importantly it vibrates issue that tackles states and societies in their format and dynamism. In this paper I will try to explain the basic understanding of the civil-military relations with a specific reference to the historical development and possibilities of interaction between the both trajectories of military power as a key player in the case of security and the civil political leadership as a key player that brings development and policies for the state. Afterward, I'll try to explain the political development of Turkey as a country that

faced a huge number of Coup D'états in the last two centuries and by doing so, we will enter into a discussion and focusing mostly on the last attempt in 2016. While rethinking the civil-military relations we will try to reveal (f) actors on the Turkish political internal dynamism that factorized once again the military power and initiated action to curb civil society polity.

Keywords: Civil-Military relations, Coup D'états, trajectories, military power, civil political leadership, development and etc.

Understanding Civil-Military Relations

The relationship between civil and military society is one of the most debated issues within the field of political science but not limited to that, historians, sociologist, and philosophers were referring quite much with their intellectual scholarship.

In the literature, we can find authors that started to debate the issues of military and civil society importance, and we can trace this in the works of Vagts (1937) and Lasswell (1941) that dominated the concept of antimilitarism. As well as in the works of many authors that were contributing in the literature during the

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post Second World War, capturing the Cold War period we find an enormous academic potential referring to civil-military relations, especially the works of (Kerwin 1948, Smith 1951, Lasswell 1950, Ekirch 1956 and Mills 1956) known as the very well known American social scientist establishing academic nuances on the perspective of possibilities to curb liberty posed by the army (**Feaver, 1999:212**).

However, Huntington in his work *The Soldier and the State (1957)* predominantly helped to be analyzed the modus Vivendi concept between the military and political leadership in all dimensions.

An interesting frame of dichotomy was created for the political scientists to understand on one hand the role of the military as a dominant factor to establish peace in times of warfare and with that to ensure protection for the whole society and on the other hand the political leadership that engulfs the position of authority through a legitimate government not only to enact policies for peace and stability but also to frame other policies which are common for democratic and participative societies, including the establishment of a meritocratic bureaucracy, rule of law, distributive democracy and different economic and social distributive and redistributive policies.

In this direction, I would say that both trajectories previously mentioned are being developed within the frame of authorities, provide substantial categories that establish a fully functional state. However, the military society for me is more complex and more questionable than civil society and this is due to the very fact that the concept of legitimacy is being targeted and mainly questioned. As for comparison, the civil society concept in a fully fledged democracy finds its legitimacy fairly enough through the process of elections, so that people distribute their sovereignty towards selected political government and by that, the focus on legitimacy becomes quite purified and democratically nuanced. In the case of military society, the ideological part and the structure plays a crucial role without the frame of selection from outside or without the usage of any legitimate process that enhances the concept of sovereignty of individuals and makes very difficult the possibility for any changes.

Furthermore, the concept is very traditional and conservative in its frame that provides the role of authority under certain provisions that function only within the military environment, and this indeed troubles the issues of transparency, accountability, and responsibility.

In this context, military societies function well under certain ideological frames and try to establish their political power over their governments specifically in societies that authoritarian, semi-authoritarian and totalitarian systems are being established, and in this direction, the military plays the crucial role once issues are being quite complex. For instance, military societies have been established in the postcolonial period within developing countries and the works of (Huntington 1968, Stepan 1971, 1988, Perlmutter 1977) and other authors played a distinctive role while examining the military-civil society relations. In the case of communist

regimes, the works of (Kolkowicz 1966, Herspring & Volgyes 1978, Colton 1979, Rice 1984, Colton & Gustafson 1990, Zisk 1993, Herspring 1996) questioned and analyzed the relationship between civil and military societies (**Feaver, 1999:213**).

Establishing the concept of military societies in these types of regimes, describe the political power and authority that the military was gaining in order to perform not only peace and security from an external perspective but as well it held grounds to bring an imaginary position that only military forces established states and with this, totally underestimated the sovereignty of individuals and citizens in one society and their political functionality was extremely subordinated.

With this, the military showed that its not only an independent organization that holds the obligation and responsibility to bring security and to prevent threats from outside factors but it established the idea and the concept that sovereignty of state derives from military-security perspective and this, totally diminishes the citizen and above all positions the army as the only holder of state sovereignty. Somehow this, remind me of the established contemporary debate between the conflicting goals of security (Hobs) and liberty (Lock) in which today's democratic states are challenged by many issues that make blurry and less vivid the case of these two conflicting goals in the frame of state policies (**Birkland, 2011: 234**). Do we need to trade our freedom and liberty for more security? This will remain a question that challenges many states in the contemporary world politics.

Going back to our civil-military discussion, we need to address the issue of complexity that arises between both trajectories in democratic states and the position of military power on *ad hoc* level to infringe within the frames of the civil political leadership and the possibility to curb the whole political establishment via Coup d'états. So, the relationship between military-civil society it's not a problem in itself within the frames of established authoritarian regimes (*since the army holds the sovereignty-Hobs*), but becomes more complex and problematic in the case of democratic societies established by constitution (*when the citizen holds the sovereignty-Lock*) as in the cases of Turkey 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997, 2016, Cyprus 1974, Egypt 2013 and etc.)

Democratic societies and the portfolio of complex interventionism of military power based on constitutional frames are dysfunctional and we will try later to develop our understanding and position about the case of Turkey as one of the most vibrant and important civil-military relationship case study via the consequences of Coup D'états attempts in row and specifically the last Coup D'état attempt in 2016.

Because of this complexity and its interaction between the limits of military and civilian political leadership, it's very important to mention the (**Huntington;1957**) *modus Vivendi* solution between these two imperatives that democratic societies need very much and points out towards creating substantial environment so that both security on one hand and the development enacted by the legitimate political establishment and their policies, on the other hand, will be

reached out through ‘a complex balancing of power and attitudes’ between civilian and military leaders (**Kalyanaraman, 2016: 112**).

In this context, we should mention that this complex balancing should avoid the position of the military to change its course from being sufficiently powerful to protect the polity into a position to attack or to become a threat to the polity (**Feaver, 1999:214**). Military structures need power, finances, and infrastructure to protect the citizens and the state itself but, this should not prevail above the civil authority or legitimacy (**Ibish, 2016:86**).

In most of the military societies we have detected this issue, actually, the enormous power and infrastructure given in their hands through constitutional provisions, make the military organization easily to shift from its foundations (providing protection). In democratic societies for which Turkey holds a big flag from 1923 as a parliamentary democracy, the hierarchy of authority should favour civilians over the military, regardless of how strong the military is, civilians/citizens are supposed to remain as one of the most important and crucial factors for the state (**Ibish, 2016:86**).

Civilian competence in the general sense extends even beyond their competence in a particular sense; that is, civilians are morally and politically competent to make the decisions even if they do not possess the relevant technical competence in the form of expertise (**Dahl, 1985**).

The whole military assets of one state should be systematically under control of the government in a sense of providing the means for its existence, controlling their activities and the given order should be balanced between the civil and the military agents (ex: ministry of defence and the generals) (**Ibish, 2016:86**).

Turkey and its developments

The modern state of Turkey has been developed under certain local and international factors such as the international political dynamism created after the First World War, its internal political challenges and the position of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk seen as the father of modern Turkish state building (1923-1938).

The Republic was founded with its basic philosophy to dissolve the old system of the Sultanate and to establish new political institutions, social structures, values, and norms, backed up with many substantial social and educational changes in the aftermath. The state concept was established on a secular basis and the principle of secularism was established into the 1924 constitution of modern Turkey (**Ibish, 2016:81**).

The most important changes that Atatürk undertook were directed within the premise to completely dissolve the old system based on the Ottoman tradition, religious conservatism, cultural ties with the Middle East and defocusing the central role of religion in the society and polity.

It is true that Atatürk’s reforms made significant changes in the political system, with this Turkey turned to the West and this became one of the substantial characteristics of the Turkish state Model (**Kamrava: 52-54**).

Of course, we need to describe the position of Mustafa Kemal as the first leader of modern Turkey that instigated the beginning of the Turkish model of the nation-state but what's more important for us is to see how he positioned his legitimacy, and in this context, we will recognize the Turkish military and civil society relations.

The state model of Turkey and Mustafa Kemal was not only redefining the concept of state affairs with its radical position through normative changes and actions related to law, economy, religion but for me, the most important political issue is that he legitimized himself as a prominent political leader through his participation in *The Turkish War of Independence (Kurtuluş Savaşı/İstiklâl Harbi/Millî Mücadele)* during the years 1919-1923.

This argument was enough to deliver a special place to the army in the national history but not only that, it was a momentum to deliver legitimacy on a political scale while blending a new concept known as a democracy with no political pluralism/competition (19123-1949). Since the army, was the most important foundation for the newly born modern state of Turkey, as a political and constitutional result, it was given to the army not only the obligation to secure the people from outside intruders but also a place in the constitution granting a status as the observer of the democratic processes that will emerge in time, so that, any government that will restrain from the “democratic processes”, the army will be obliged to infringe and take control via Coup d'état.

These political and constitutional manoeuvres that the modern state of Turkey organized via Mustafa Kemal, brought a lot of negative consequences on a large political, economic and ideological scale in the years to come including the systematic Coup D'états that Turkey became naturally immune of army interventions towards legitimate civil governments during 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997 and 2016, of course in all of these cases with different pretexts and different political environments.

Even though after the Lausanne Treaty 1923, Turkey shifted from an offensive foreign policy towards a more defensive and a status quo position was taken (peace at home, peace in the world), Turkey was involved in many regional political and military activism. Its perception was to create more allies rather enemies and therefore as examples, you can see its perspective towards the Balkan states while becoming part of the Balkan Entente 1934 (Öksüz 2007: 135).

This was a military alliance between Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia responding to guarantee the security of several Balkan states against any other foreign aggression.

Immediately after the Second World War, Turkey started to stabilize and strengthen the relationship with international organizations and with states like the US and for pro-democratic values. Turkey joined NATO 1952, the Turkish membership of Western institutions such as the Council of Europe, the OECD, and its associate membership of the EC, strengthening Turkey's closeness to the West

and promoting the western political and military position during the Cold War period (**Ibish, 2016: 81**).

Moving towards *the foreign policy of Turkey*, according to Mustafa Aydin, there are certain structural variables (geographical position, historical experiences, cultural background together with the national stereotypes and images of other nations, economic necessities as the major structural variables) and conjunctural variables (are dynamic and subject to change under interrelated developments in domestic politics and international relations) (**Aydin, 1999: 155**). Dominant factors towards the structural variables are as follows: Ottoman experience and its long-lasting legacy, the geopolitical realities of Turkey and the ideological foundations defined under the leadership of Atatürk.

Turkey was perceived as being at the crossroads of major air, land and sea routes of modern times, connecting the industrially advanced lands of Europe with the petroleum-rich lands of the Middle East and by that deeply determined by its geostrategic position (**Aydin 1999: 24**).

Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu sees these elements that shaped the Turkish foreign policy: its Western orientation or the Kemalists ideology of Westernization as the dominant identity that influenced Turkey's foreign policy from the founding of the Republic until the end of the Cold War (**Bozdağlıoğlu 2003**).

As for Davutoglu, In his book *Strategic Depth* he believes that there are particular determinants in the structure of the international system as global geopolitical parameters (**Davutoglu: 2008**). After the end of the Cold War, world politics shifted from bipolar strategic stability to a multi-polar balance of power. According to this a geopolitical and geo-economic vacuum emerged in these strategic zones and turned these areas into the zones of clashes and power struggle and this has been seen as an opportunity for Turkey.

As for *economic development*, Turkey has been driven by the liberal free market concept after the 1980s through deep reforms on its infrastructure and deregulation (**Ibish, 2016: 83**). Its geographical positioning allows Turkey to play a crucial and independent role not only in trade, tourism and agriculture but also it became a key player with regard to gas and oil pipeline mediator via its territory that can be seen as the only alternative for the Russian geographical monopoly of oil and gas supply towards Western European industries.

Turkey and its Coup D'états development

From the political aspect, the Turkish Model was also several times interrupted from *the state army (coup d'état 1960, 1971, and 1980)* and since 1983 Turkey was governed from civil rulers (**Celik, 1999: 11**). The Coup D'état organized in 1997 essentially was another civil governmental interruption by the military and brought a new discourse to the state-military relationship (**Ibish, 2016: 84**).

The history of the Turkish state somehow is doomed to military infringements via Coup D'états and in this regard, I would like to state that when we look back to history we find an enormous act of military interventions towards

the civil government via different channels of justification and a format of general hypnoses of acceptance.

The first time that the army intervened in Turkish state politics is the Coup D'états in 1960 (Erkanlı, 1972: 3). The moment of justification for this act from the military side was very low and according to Kucuk, the argumentation was based on some artificial and exaggerated crisis image created by some academics, officers, and journalists (Küçük, 2005: 73). Of course, the consequences were the dissolution of the civil government led by the prime minister Adnan Menderes elected via fair and legit elections but hanged by the military junta together with two other members of his cabinet.

In the case of the second Coup D'états in Turkey, during 1971 the military authorities were in a very complex internal situation in which generals were in different sides while trying to support or not a leftist ideology coup d'état, as most of them were opposing the leftist ideological concept of coup d'états, the National Intelligence Agency learned the plan and reported the organization (**Küçüközyiğit, 2016: 321**). Afterward, the generals decided to send a memorandum for which the Prime minister Suleyman Demirel resigned by automatism.

As for the third Coup D'états in Turkey, it was led by the Chief of Staff Kenan Evren and on the 12th of September 1980, by a systematic command the military infringed the civil government, and for three years it took control, afterward new democratic elections were allowed. As a consequence, many political parties, unions, associations, and organizations were banned (**Küçüközyiğit, 2016: 324**). Even though this Coup was not supported quite much as the Coup during the 1960s, the concept of Kemalism through the figure of Mustafa Kemal as the father of modern Turkey was quite much used, and we can state that Kemalism as a doctrine was the justification that the army used systematically to prove their position. As a consequence of this, in times of military seizures, the state of Turkey will promote a very difficult constitution for its democracy and civil society, nonetheless, in 1997 Turkey faced its fourth Coup D'états attempt for which the coalition government led by the Prime minister Necmettin Erbakan had to resign after accepting the Coup D'état memorandum instigated by the army forces. In this context, the Coup D'état was justified under the argumentation that Erbakan was about to shift the state with his policies towards an Islamist society by the means of political Islam and for that reason, they had to intervene, by closing the Welfare Party (Refa Party) of Necmettin Erbakan that was renamed afterward as Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi).

Turkey during the Coup D'état attempt 15 July 2016

Looking at the last attempt of Coup D'état on the 15th of July 2016, we can mention that the state and the civil society of Turkey was facing a new political shock for which was not ready not only to see as that happening but it seems to me that the leading political civil structure was not ready to accept that very fact. However, late in the evening of the 15th of July, 2016, military units were publicly

positioned in places and attempted to take control on all levels of the government, state institutions, national media, and key points of communication in the country, operating under the name “The Peace at Home Council” (*Yurtta Sulh Konseyi*) (Haugom, 2019:1).

It is interesting to mention the very fact that not all generals were accepting these rules to amend and implicate a Coup D’état in Turkey especially in this period when constitutional changes were adopted in 2010 to change the road of Turkey’s military-civil relations and in times when the ideology of Kemalism in the army structures was suppressed by the leading AK party policies after 2002 under the leadership of Taip Erdogan.

Nonetheless, this gives us the main argumentation that the last Coup D’état was not instigated by the same ideological formats of Kemalism that we can see in the previous four phases that Turkey went through. The last Coup attempt completely differs not only from its failure but also by the way in which people, the civil society and the media had a chain reaction. Complete unification of all sides was positioned to classify this attempt as a violation of the democratic processes and the democratic history of Turkey and showed huge political solidarity of all political denominations as well of all ethnical backgrounds in Turkey.

The civil society prevailed over military infringement. The main difference relies upon the very reason that the voice of people (*vox populi*) was present in the streets and that both the *civil society (citizens) vs. military society (soldiers)* clashed. In this regard, it is important to be mentioned and to be criticized the very fact that many important states that proclaim democracy and democratic values as well as many inter-governmental and international organizations tried to calculate with the results of the Coup attempt and were not in a position to protect and support the Turkish civil society fully. A small number of countries supported the civil government in Turkey that night and the days afterward, and this shows the very fact that there is a democratic deficit and support on a universal level. How we define Coup D’états attempts and how we perceive them became an issue of different state interests and political environments, instead of being a universal concept where the civil society prevails over military society, many democratic governments were blind and blurry in their actions and positions. It seems to me that the case of the Coup D’état attempt in Turkey in 2016 opened the discussion not only about the possibilities of the military power to intrude and infringe civil governments in the 21st century but it opened even much larger academic debates on this issue.

Let us enter in the background and try to reveal and discuss the factors that implicated the army in the last Coup D’état attempt in 2016.

In order to understand the Turkish political and ideological pluralism and the Turkish political culture, we should, of course, understand the religious community potential that helped the civil society to be effectively organized on educational, cultural, religious and political matters in these years. The Turkish model of civil society helped by the religious communities (*jamaats*) is

tremendously organized, well structured, ideologically supportive and a good system to deliver results under the scope of social capital (**Ibish, 2016: 87**).

In this regard a movement was introduced according to their leader's name Fetullah Gulen (www.fgulen.com), known as Gulenist movement, supposedly using the teachings of Said Nursi, a very well known religious figure in the Ottoman and afterward in the modern Turkish state history. This community was well organized in approaching all social needs through different religious and educational programs and affiliations (www.hizmetnews.com). It was perceived from the very beginning as one of the most important social community capital that works on highly respective and important educational and religious cases. The majority of Muslims in the Turkish society knew that they work under the name of Allah and they will never manipulate with Gods words or with their policies coming from this religious reference (**Ibish, 2016:88**).

A huge religious and social authority was granted for this movement in Turkey, this easily paved ground to develop its programs outside of Turkey as well. Therefore, you will find this movement to be established in many states and countries around the globe, using the financial assets from individuals, entrepreneurs, educational assets, businesses, and state protection. From scratch, it became an organizational empire that could pull many activities in many countries in one period. This, accumulated a huge financial and human power within their scope and undoubtedly the links with the state affairs, gave them a new political psychological understanding. A crucial moment for the Turkish state is when they imposed the idea that students that come from their educational denomination will be the best asset for the state administration (**Ibish, 2016:88**).

A huge clash resulted between the Turkish government under Ahmet Davutoglu and Binali Yildirim political terms and Recep Taip Erdogan being a president of Turkey vs. the Gulenist movement, in general, being backed up by their leader in the USA, Fetullah Gulen.

The last actually the fifth Coup D'états attempt in the 15th of July 2016 in Turkey was marked with a very strange attitude:

- Firstly showing that it is orchestrated by a different centre of power and it is not coming from the very ground of militaries authorities and ideological reasons (possible Kemalism) that were used during the previous coups in the Turkish history
- Secondly, not to whole military structures were given orders to have a coup in Turkey
- Thirdly, inside the military, there were soldiers of different ranks that were not involved or rejected such kind of activity
- Fourthly, a huge manipulation was created under false flag order towards youngsters in the military and
- Fifthly, there was no political or economic or any other insecurity issues in Turkey, that the military will be in a position to order the coup (see the example of 1971 and 1980 coup d'états) (**Ibish, 2016:89-90**).

The last coup attempt in Turkey showed that the military structures without good civil control can be a problem with regard to citizen's protection, and the protection of its own country and polity. The military should protect its citizens and not suppress them for political calculations. If there is no political culture change and civil control that balances and checks the military affiliation in Turkey, it will be very difficult to ensure that the military will be willing to do what civilians ask. And therefore, solving the coup attempt doesn't necessarily mean that the military power might be later in control.

Conclusion

The relationship of civil-military relations undoubtedly plays an important role within the state affairs and drills permanently new perspectives with regard to democratic developments and instigates new changes within the political spectrum of states.

The complex interaction between the limits of military and civilian political leadership needs an important impetus towards a modus Vivendi solution that will promote cooperation instead of antagonism or complex interdependency instead of conflict attitudes.

The Huntington's concept of a 'complex balancing of power and attitudes' between civilian and military leaders it's still valuable and this needs to be promoted in the countries that military society continues to insist and promote control of military society over the civil political leadership. Military structures need power, finances, and infrastructure to protect the citizens and the state itself but, this should not prevail above the civil authority or legitimacy.

The whole military assets of one state should be systematically under control of the government in a sense of providing the means for its existence, controlling their activities and the given order should be balanced between the civil and the military agents (ex: ministry of defence and the generals).

The historical developments within the political and military frame in the case of Turkey, undoubtedly provide for us arguments that Turkey is the best example from an academic point of view to observe the military-civil relations, and the long lasting period of many developments portrait the Turkish political culture to be doomed in the perspective of military control over civil political leadership, of course in different periods with different contexts of justifications.

The last Coup d'état attempt in Turkey in 2016 brought a new perspective under the banner of military insurgency and redefined the main cause of Coup d'état instigators, it promoted the idea that not only the established ideology of Kemalism provides doctrine of justification of military interruptions over civil legitimate governments, but it also showed that the social capital created under the banner of religious communities (jamaats) can orchestrate and use the tools of the military or manipulate the entire military organization to instigate an act of state interruption for specific religious, ideological and political benefits.

For Turkey, this is a new momentum to rethink the military-civil relations under the provisions of social capital and the religious community support that is dominantly effective in the Turkish political environment. The centre right political parties including AK Party need to find new modalities to reframe the religious community support during elections in a way that these religious communities under the provisions of social capital will be used and will be beneficial for the civil society and polity but only under the scope of diversity. No monopolies of religious communities should be established and diversification is the best frame work to continue to benefit and get support from them but not elevating them in to a stage in which coming back is impossible.

Of course, the best case would be having a military that will provide security and stability for the state under its internal organizational autonomy with a greater civil political control.

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