

TURKEYSCOPE

INSIGHTS ON TURKISH AFFAIRS

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 MDC The Moshe Dayan Center
for Middle Eastern and African Studies



Vol. 1, No. 1, November 2016

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From the Editors

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is proud to present our inaugural issue of our newest monthly publication, *Turkeyscope*. This issue discusses two major phenomena in Turkish affairs, at both the national and regional levels. The first article, written by Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, focuses on immediate measures that have been taken by the Turkish educational system, which are intended to shape public opinion about the failed July 2016 coup and its perpetrators. The second article, written by Ceng Sagnic, reviews Turkey's policy of military deployment to multiple theatres over the past two years, and expounds upon structural differences between the deployments to Qatar-Somalia and Syria-Iraq.

Sarah Jacobs contributed to this issue as assistant editor.

Resetting Citizens' Mindset: Coups and Education in Turkey

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

Many Turks perceived the failed coup attempt of July 15, claiming 240 lives,¹ as an unexpected, extraordinary event. The core reason for this surprise at the Turkish Armed Forces' (*Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri* – TSK) actions was that starting with the Ergenekon probe in 2007, over the last decade, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) has had relative success in downgrading the TSK's role in the decision making process. Additionally, abolition of trade barriers, penetration of satellite TV channels, relatively cheap flight tickets, Internet access, and usage of social media platforms have exposed the Turkish people to Western democracies, weakening the TSK's position. These developments made it difficult for the TSK to legitimize itself through the Turkish education system and textbooks.

Historically, Turkey suffers from a tradition of coups and military interventions. Turkey is the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, which experienced six successful military coups in 1512, 1622, 1807, 1876, 1909 and 1913. Later, having liberated the country from the allied forces during the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the TSK began to see itself as the true owner of the republic and became intertwined with Atatürk's Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP). Thus Adnan Menderes' Democrat Party's (*Demokrat Parti* – DP) victory over the CHP re-triggered the coup culture in Turkey. In order to provide themselves with a legitimate platform, the 1960 coup perpetrators misused TSK's Inner Service Law's (1935) article 34, which underlined army's obligation of preserving the republic. In 1961, to pave the way for potential military interventions in the future, the article was reformulated as article 35. Its language was simplified and further emphasized TSK's right to act as the watchdog of the republic. Indeed, the article granted the legitimate basis for the 1971 and 1980 classic military coups, as well as the 1997 and 2007 military interventions. However, despite the counter-democratic nature of these acts, many Turks have seen TSK's interventions as legitimate acts, perceiving the military as a built-in check and balance on the state.

Until recently, this perception has been shaped by the Turkish education system. In addition to militaristic rituals and flag ceremonies at schools, the portrayal of TSK by

history, civics and national security studies textbooks provides insight into this mechanism of indoctrination.

It should be noted that TSK's self-legitimization efforts did not start with the 1960 military coup. A history textbook first published in 1932 serves as concrete evidence of this phenomenon. In its preamble, the textbook included the portraits of prominent Turkish leaders, who dominated key positions in government, such as President Atatürk, Prime Minister İnönü, head of the Grand National Assembly Kazım Paşa, and the Chief of Staff Fevzi Paşa.² This highlights the importance attributed to the TSK under Atatürk and İnönü. In other words, this preamble section visually demonstrates the status that the TSK gained in the early days of the republic and explains the consequences of its behaviors in the post-single-party period, when it was challenged by various governments.

Besides the leaders' portraits in the history textbook, TSK's status in the education system was also strengthened by a course called National Security Studies (*Milli Güvenlik Bilgisi*), introduced into the curriculum in 1926. The main aim of the course was to prepare the Turkish youth for army service. Unsurprisingly, textbooks penned by the office of the Chief of Staff portrayed army service as the highest national duty of all Turkish citizens.

In order to avoid reliance on a civilian teacher, the course was taught by army officers or retired soldiers. In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, besides presenting educational material on army service, the textbooks expanded their scope, and sought to inculcate Atatürkism in the masses. In this context, the TSK was portrayed as the watchdog of the republic. TSK's Inner Service Law was frequently quoted to legitimize TSK's role in the decision making process.³ Additionally, the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* – MGK), a semi-military-civilian government body, was given a special importance, highlighted as the shadow cabinet responsible for the most important decisions.⁴

Despite the institutionalization of these indoctrination machineries, following the crisis at the office of the Chief of Staff, which led to the resignation of General Işık Koşaner in 2012, former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan seized the opportunity to make changes, removing the National Security Studies course from the

curriculum. However, even after removing the TSK's self-legitimizing textbook passages Turkish textbooks continued to lack information about the coups.

Civics textbooks serve as the most important examples of this phenomenon. Apart from the textbooks that were published in the aftermath of the military interventions,⁵ the textbooks did not provide any information about TSK's involvement in the constitution making process.⁶ The words coup or military intervention were not even mentioned.⁷ Instead, the students were provided with a superficial list of constitutions without any information on the core reason for their replacement.⁸ Therefore, students tend to believe that the entire legislation process was carried out in a democratic way.

This attitude came to an end with the latest July 15 coup attempt. Having grasped the importance of the education system's impact on public consciousness, on September 19, the first day of the academic year, in an unprecedented act, the civilian government gave students free booklets praising the anti-coup resistance. While making direct correlations to Turkey's war of independence, the booklet provided information about the coup attempt. The booklets included pictures of the coup night, martyrs, and democracy rallies, as well as "the coup attempt timeline." These educational materials were accompanied by a section called "July 15 Dictionary," in which concepts like coup, republic, and junta were addressed. Since Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet Movement was held primarily responsible for the coup attempt, this body was de-legitimized and renamed as Fethullahist Terrorist Organization (*Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü* – FETÖ).⁹

Besides this booklet, in order to create further awareness in the schools, Turkey's Ministry of National Education declared the 19-23 of September to be the "July 15, Democracy Victory and Commemoration of the Martyrs" week. In this context, Turkish Literature, History, Social Studies, and Religious Studies courses' teachers were assigned to cover the coup attempt in their classrooms.¹⁰

The Turkish Ministry of National Education's post-July 15 measures mark a revolutionary change in the history of Turkish education. For the first time ever, anti-coup themes were openly added to the national curriculum. While in the short run, this was carried out by printing superficial booklets, in the long run it is highly likely that most of the textbooks will be re-written to include comprehensive information

about the coup attempt. With this bold move, the government seeks to shape future citizens' structures of thought, and aspires to defeat coup culture in Turkish society.

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Challenges to Turkey's Military Deployments Abroad

Ceng Sagnic

Turkey's growing intention to deploy troops abroad first surfaced in late 2015, as plans to establish a military base in Qatar were revealed.¹¹ The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP) government later announced deployments to the coast of Somalia adjacent to the Red Sea¹² and to northern Iraq's Bashik (Bashiqah), a sub-district of Nineveh north of Mosul, the country's second largest city.¹³ Up until 2015, Turkey's military deployments beyond its borders remained limited to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in the framework of a declared objective to prevent attacks by the separatist Kurdish movement, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* - PKK).¹⁴ In fact, the large presence of the Turkish military in the camps scattered across the northern frontier of the region served this objective effectively during multiple incursions against PKK since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, these bases were established for exclusively operational purposes, in the likely case of Turkish incursions into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and thus remained almost completely isolated, awaiting renewed clashes with PKK.

The ultimate philosophy of planned Turkish troop deployments to Qatar and Somalia were announced in early 2015, as components of a proactive Turkish foreign policy that lacked direct engagement with local belligerents. Notwithstanding the earlier declarations that deployments by the Turkish military had neutral purposes and were to be made in conjunction with local governments' expectations, sudden deployments to Bashik and later to northern Syria's rebel-held regions contradicted such philosophy and involved Turkish troops in ongoing battles. The Euphrates Shield operation, launched by the Turkish military and Syrian rebel organizations on 24 August 2016, has so far resulted in the expansion of these groups' territorial control of border areas previously controlled by the Islamic State (IS) in the north. Meanwhile, in the last few months, Turkey declared multiple times that it intends to launch operations against the IS in northern Iraq similar to its ongoing operation in northern Syria. Yet, local Kurdish sources had already reported multiple times that since 2015, Turkish tanks were involved in limited-scale skirmishes with IS militants in northern Iraq while supporting the Peshmerga forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).¹⁵ The absolute lack of cooperation with local authorities and the involvement

of Turkish troops in the civil wars of Syria and Iraq set the deployment to these two countries apart from the establishment of military bases in Qatar and Somalia, representing a categorical difference between the deployments.

This categorical difference is apparent in Syria and Iraq, where the success of Turkish military missions rests on the military capacity of Turkey's local partners against other belligerents. In Syria, the Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA) has managed to advance deep into IS-controlled territories and has prevented the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from expanding along the border with Turkey in order to connect the self-proclaimed cantons of Kobane and Afrin. Hence, the deployment of forces by Turkey has already been declared a victory against both the IS and the US-backed Kurdish groups.¹⁶ Whereas in Iraq, Turkey's declared effort to lead local Sunni-Arab militias to serious gains in the war against the IS is still far from the reality.

The Turkish military base in the Bashik region was established in 2015 to train Sunni militias known as *Hashd al-Watani* and commanded by the former governor of Nineveh Atheel al-Nujaifi. Immediately after almost one-third of Iraq was captured by the IS, Atheel al-Nujaifi - whose seat was overrun by IS militants in June 2014, in the course of a three-days attack on Mosul - began to mobilize a force of Sunni volunteers from local civilians and former police officers of Mosul. The initial plan was declared as an exclusive cooperation with the KRG in order to recapture Mosul without any intervention by forces of the central Iraqi government.¹⁷ The mobilization period in Nineveh also coincided with the aftermath of a *fatwa* issued by Iraq's highest Shi'i religious authority, Ali al-Sistani, which called for the formation of Shi'i volunteer forces to fight off the IS expansion in northern Iraq.¹⁸

Turkey's subsequent involvement in support of al-Nujaifi's *Hashd al-Watani* - which the central Iraqi government deprived of any material support in favor Shi'i militias - fell short of preparing this local Sunni force to retake Mosul from the battle-hardened and well-equipped IS militants. According to both Turkish and Sunni-Iraqi sources, a few thousand Sunni militia fighters that were stationed at the Turkish military base in the KRG-controlled part of the Nineveh province were provided only military training while desperately waiting for the US-led international coalition and the central Iraqi government to recognize and equip them.¹⁹

Challenges to the Turkish project in northern Iraq are not limited to the military shortcomings of the Sunni volunteer fighters in the face of the well-equipped and trained forces of the IS and the central Iraqi government. In the summer of 2016, a few months before the start of the ongoing Mosul operation, negotiations between the central Iraqi government and Turkey's only legitimate ally in Iraq, the KRG, restarted in an attempt to reach a US-supervised consensus for the Mosul offensive. In early September 2016, the KRG announced that it had secured an agreement with the central Iraqi government that in exchange for direct talks on its prospective independence referendum, provided Iraqi forces with access to KRG-controlled parts of northern Iraq for the purpose of an operation on Mosul.²⁰ Although the semi-autonomous KRG refused to allow Shi'i militia forces to enter the Kurdistan Region, its ultimate permission of Iraqi military use of its territories unavoidably paved the way for Iranian-backed militias to open up a northward supply route reaching the far outskirts of Mosul from the south.²¹ Considering the unconditional US air and ground support for joint Iraqi forces, including Shi'i militias, in the war against the IS in northern Iraq, the Turkish-backed project of transferring the future administration of Mosul to the Sunni volunteer forces of *Hashd al-Watani* has once again been sidelined.

Turkey's expanding military missions in a number of countries, including its southern neighbors Iraq and Syria, continue to serve as subsidiary arguments in its domestic political rhetoric of converting Turkey into a global actor. Advocates of this policy often describe it as the revival of the Ottoman past, breaking the century-long self-imposed isolation of successive pre-AKP regimes. However, as is apparent in the comparative cases of military deployments to Syria and Iraq, the projected expansion of Turkey's regional influence is predominantly dependent on the strength of its local allies, rather than the inherent capacity of the Turkish military itself. The exclusion of Turkish-backed *Hashd al-Watani* from the Mosul operation (and presumably from the city's future administration) serves as the most recent evidence that in the spectrum of the wars in Syria and Iraq, the capacity of local belligerents is still conditioned by the intervention or noninterference of global powers. Unlike Mosul, where the US implicitly decided to support only Shi'i and Kurdish components of Iraqi security forces at the expense of Turkish-backed Sunnis, it would be fair to argue that the

relative success of the Turkish-backed FSA operations in northern Syria rested on a lack of similar interference.

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The Moshe Dayan Center publishes *Turkeyscope* as a monthly analytical discussion on Turkish national and geopolitical affairs. *Turkeyscope* is published approximately on the 15th of every month, as well as occasional Special Editions.

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