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# The Turkish Military: Principal or Agent?

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## Abstract

One of the defining features of Turkish politics has been the strong influence of the military in civilian politics. However, since the early 2000s, we have seen unprecedented developments, substantially constraining the political powers of the military. How can we interpret this period from a historical perspective? What are the continuities and discontinuities in Turkish civil–military relations? Do these developments mark the end of military guardianship in the country? Employing the principal–agent framework, this study shows that the path of Turkish civil–military relations has been cyclical, where the status of the military has swung between agent and principal. Such swings have led to a significant degree of variance in the nature of the military guardianship. Thus, this study identifies two distinct stages of military tutelage during the Republican period: *symbolic* (1924–1960) and *overt/assertive* (1960–2001). It is further argued that the recent reversion of the military back to agent of the civilian principals has initiated a *post-guardianship* era in Turkey.

## Keywords

civil–military relations, principal–agent framework, military guardianship, Turkish military

## Introduction

A common observation in the literature on Turkish civil–military relations is that the military has not only been a security institution but also a key political actor.<sup>1</sup>

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Viewing and presenting itself as the protector of Kemalist principles (especially secularism and nationalism) as well as the protector of state and national interests against internal and external threats, the military has been playing the role of “guardian” in Turkish polity.<sup>2</sup> Through direct (e.g., a coup or threat of a coup via memoranda) or indirect means and mechanisms (e.g., statements or briefings on political issues; private meetings; mobilizing civilian forces and actors), the military has frequently been involved in civilian politics. Several studies contend that the main motivations behind these intrusions were to protect the secular order and to save the state apparatus, rather than to establish a protracted military regime.<sup>3</sup>

That being said, we have seen unprecedented developments in Turkish civil–military relations since the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> As outlined below, Turkish governments have achieved substantial legal and institutional reforms that curb the military’s political powers. Although some studies are skeptical about the overall impact of these reforms on the civilianization of the political system,<sup>5</sup> the common view is that Turkish civil–military relations have already entered a new era.<sup>6</sup> Reductions in the military’s formal institutional and legal prerogatives emerge as important, novel developments promoting civilian supremacy in the country. Such modifications include changes in the duties and composition of the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* [MGK]); the removal of military members or representatives from public bodies such as the Council of Higher Education (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu* [YÖK], responsible for coordinating and regulating university education) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (*Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu* [RTÜK]), which oversees radio and television broadcasting; the empowerment of civilian courts vis-à-vis the military (e.g., the detentions and trials of several military officers); greater civilian oversight of military spending and promotions and increasing criticisms of the military’s role in politics by societal actors (e.g., columnists, academics, intellectuals, civil society organizations). Looking at these transformations, several observers conclude that a full-blooded military intervention in Turkey has become almost impossible.<sup>7</sup>

Given these developments, this study broaches the following questions: How can we interpret the recent unprecedented changes in Turkish civil–military relations? What are the continuities and discontinuities? Do we see a shift to a post-guardianship era? What are the implications of the recent developments for the prospects of Turkish civil–military relations? In order to answer these questions, this study employs a combination of an across-time comparison and typological theorizing. In other words, we attempt to trace the evolution of military guardianship across time within the Turkish case and identify distinct types or cases of military guardianship and the configurations of variables constituting or generating those theoretical types.<sup>8</sup> This method will better enable us to analyze continuities and discontinuities in Turkish civil–military relations. This study benefits from using the principal–agent framework as a theoretical tool; it is rather puzzling that this approach has so far not really been utilized in studies of Turkish civil–military relations.

*Arguments:* In a democratic system of rule, the military is expected to operate as the agent of civilian principals. Turkish civil–military relations, however, have involved various principal–agent configurations. In the early Republic (1924–1960), the military on the whole acted as the loyal agent of civilian principals. However, beginning in the early 1960s, the roles reversed; the old agent (the military) became the new principal. Through the reforms since the early 2000s, the military has reverted to the position of agent. Such swings between different principal–agent configurations have also altered the nature of military guardianship in Turkey. This study contends that the early Republic was characterized by symbolic guardianship. In the 1960s, it was replaced by a more overt and assertive type. The developments since the early 2000s appear to have initiated a post-guardianship era in Turkish civil–military relations.

The article proceeds as follows: the first part briefly presents the main premises of the principal–agent framework and its relevance to studies of civil–military relations. This part also constructs a typology of principal–agent interaction in a civil–military context. The second part applies that typology to Turkish civil–military relations during the Republican period. The conclusion provides the conceptual and theoretical implications of the study and briefly discusses the prospects of Turkish civil–military relations.

## **Part I: The Principal–Agent Framework**

This study approaches civil–military relations from the perspective of the principal–agent framework, which treats civil–military relations as a strategic interaction between a principal (civilians) and an agent (the military). The principal–agent framework seems to have great potential to enhance our comprehension of continuities and discontinuities in Turkish civil–military relations.

In general, the principal–agent framework assumes that as a rational actor (i.e., a utility maximizer) the principal (e.g., employer) delegates authority to an agent (e.g., employee or contractor) to perform certain tasks in a much more effective way. The agent, who seems to better execute those tasks, is expected to act in the interests of the principal. The central problem, however, is how to ensure that the presumably rational and self-interested agent acts in the principal’s best interests? This is a key issue in the principal–agent relationship; due to greater expertise, the agent has an informational advantage over the principal and her interests might differ. These factors (i.e., informational asymmetry vis-à-vis the principal and the divergence of interests) are likely to create incentives for the agent to shirk rather than to work for the principal. In other words, the agent might pursue its own interests, neglecting the interests of the principal, or behave in ways inimical to the preferences of the principal (also known as agency loss, agency slippage, or agency shirking). In order to minimize the likelihood of such suboptimal outcomes, the principal may provide certain incentives to the agent (e.g., wages, profit sharing, bonuses) and/or adopt

several administrative and oversight procedures and punishment mechanisms (e.g., reporting, screening, budgetary control, firing).<sup>9</sup>

Although widely used in political science, particularly in studies of elected officials, legislatures, bureaucracy, and public administration, the principal–agent framework is rarely utilized in studies of civil–military relations. However, the relationship between civilians and the military can be viewed as a principal–agent relationship because it involves a strategic and hierarchical interaction between a superior and a subordinate. As Feaver, who provides the most systematic application of the principal–agent framework to civil–military relations, observes:

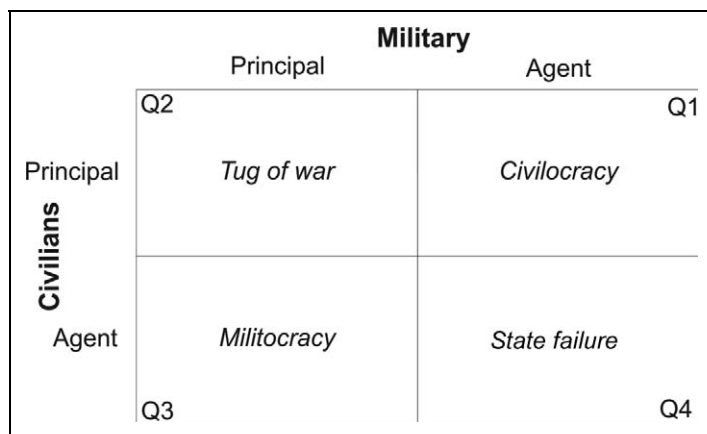
Civilians invent the military, contracting with it to protect society from enemies, but then civilians find it necessary to assure themselves that the military will behave as intended. Relations between civilians and the military are, in their most basic form, a strategic interaction carried out within a hierarchical setting. It is strategic interaction because the choices civilians make are contingent on their expectations of what the military is likely to do, and vice versa. It is hierarchical (at least in democracies) because civilians enjoy the privileged position; civilians have legitimate authority over the military, whatever their *de facto* ability to control the military may be.<sup>10</sup>

Feaver suggests that these two features of civil military relations (i.e., strategic interaction and hierarchy) also define the nature of the principal–agent relationship. In a civil–military context, the players are the civilians (the principal) and the military (the agent). Civilians delegate authority to the military to build up necessary capabilities to defend the country and to use force on behalf of the society whenever necessary. Military officials may not always agree with the civilians and their preferences on policy matters; however, in a democratic system of rule, where civilian preferences must prevail over military preferences, the military agent should not abuse the delegated power and informational advantage. If the military does not follow the instructions provided by the civilian principals it would be viewed as shirking its responsibilities. As Feaver suggests:

the military agent is said to shirk when, whether through laziness, insolence, or preventable incompetence, it deviates from its agreement with the civilians in order to pursue different preferences, for instance by not doing what the civilians have requested, or not in the way the civilians wanted, or in such a way as to undermine the ability of the civilians to make future decisions.<sup>11</sup>

In a civil–military context, military shirking might take various forms such as providing poor or misleading advice to civilian policymakers, resisting civilian instructions, delaying policy implementation and/or pursuing its own interests at the expense of the interests of the country. The most extreme shirking would be staging a military coup, which would automatically end the principal–agent relationship.

One limitation of Feaver’s analysis, however, is that he provides little mention of cases beyond the United States. As he also acknowledges, the putative agents (the



**Figure 1.** Principal–agent configurations in a civil–military context.

military) might sometimes alter the superior–subordinate relationship by overtaking the principal but this has not been the case in the United States, where, despite occasional conflicts or clashes, the military has remained the agent of civilian principals. The Turkish case thus constitutes an interesting laboratory for the principal–agent framework because the military agent has overtaken the civilian principals several times. Studying such extreme forms of agency shirking (i.e., a coup) will contribute to our comprehension of pathological forms of the principal–agent interaction.

As stated above, in a civil–military context we expect civilians to constitute the principal, and the military to act as the agent. However, several cases across the world, including the Turkish case, suggest that this is only one configuration of the relationship; there are several other possible states. It is hypothetically possible that either actor can play the principal or agent. As shown in Figure 1, this creates a four-fold typology. The first quadrant represents the normatively desired situation, where the military operates as the agent of the civilian principals. In other words, the military is effectively controlled by the political elites. Even in the case of a conflict, civilians prevail over the military. We might call such a polity a civilocracy (e.g., as in North America and Western Europe).<sup>12</sup> In the second quadrant, the military challenges the supremacy of the civilian principals and attempts to act as the principal. In such a situation (i.e., both sides operating as a principal), a “tug-of-war” between political elites and military officials would ensue. In the third quadrant, the military is the new principal, while the civilians become the new agent (a militocracy). In this case, the military dominates the political system by either directly ruling or acting as a veto player or guardian within the polity. Military regimes in several Latin American countries in the 1970s constituted some typical examples of this configuration. The fourth quadrant represents a situation where the civilians and the military operate as agents. Such a state might be regarded as unlikely in real

		Military	
		Principal	Agent
Civilians	Principal	<i>Tug of war:</i> 1983-1993	<i>Civilocracy:</i> 1924-1960 2001-
	Agent	<i>Militocracy:</i> 1960-2001	<i>State failure</i>

**Figure 2.** Principal–agent interaction in Turkish civil–military relations.

life but state failure due to foreign occupation or colonial rule would be an illustrative example. In such political systems, the civilians and the military are subordinated by the occupiers or the colonizers. The following section applies these typologies to Republican Turkey.

## Part II: Turkish Civil–Military Relations

When we apply the above typologies to Turkish civil–military relations, we see the presence of various principal–agent configurations, even highly pathological ones. As Figure 2 shows, civil–military relations during the Republican period involved not only civilocracy but also militocracy and tug-of-war. The civilocracy of the early Republic was replaced by a militocracy in the second half of the twentieth century. This period also involved a tug-of-war between political and military elites, particularly during Özal’s leadership (1983–1993). However, in the early 2000s, we see signs of a shift back to civilocracy.<sup>13</sup> This section briefly analyzes this unstable path and attempts to answer the following questions: what are the main features of those phases? Do the developments in the post-2000 period represent an irreversible trend toward civilocracy? To ask this question differently, is military guardianship over in Turkey?

### *Civilocracy (1924–1960)*

Unlike the late Ottoman period, the early Republic was characterized by civilian supremacy and the relegation of the military into a secondary position vis-à-vis the ruling Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* [CHP]).<sup>14</sup> Experiencing the fatal results of the Young Turk praetorianism during the late Ottoman Empire,<sup>15</sup> the founding fathers of the Republic tried to prevent serving officers from becoming

involved in politics.<sup>16</sup> As a result, they took a number of steps to enhance civilian control in the Republic's early years. For instance, in December 1923, Parliament passed a law that required military officers to resign from the army before they could be elected to public office (Law No. 385). In the following year, the chief of staff's seat in the cabinet was eliminated and the position was made accountable to the president.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the role of the military in this period, Hale notes that "The army's withdrawal from active political involvement was generally maintained, and the soldiers remained strictly in the background."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Huntington propounds that "the party [the CHP] came out of the womb of the army, political generals created a political party, and the political party put an end to political generals."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is fair to suggest that effective civilian control of the armed forces defines the general feature of this period.

It is striking, however, that Kemalism, the founding philosophy of the Republic, attributed a Platonic mission to the military. Mustafa Kemal (the founder of the Republic) stated during his Konya speech (February 1931) that:

... whenever the Turkish nation has wanted to take a step up, it has always looked to the army . . . as the leader of movements to achieve lofty national ideals . . . When speaking of the army, I am speaking of the intelligentsia of the Turkish nation who are *the true owners of this country* . . . *The Turkish nation . . . considers its army the guardian of its ideals* (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Article 34 of the Army Internal Service Law, enacted in 1935 (Law No. 2771), stated that "the duty of the armed forces is to protect and defend the Turkish homeland and the Turkish Republic, as determined in the Constitution." Thus, the founding fathers, who tried to limit military influence over civilian politics, also saw the military as the true owner and guardian of the Republic.<sup>21</sup>

The First Republic (1924–1960), then, constitutes a curious stage in the history of Turkish civil–military relations. On one hand, the military operated as the loyal agent of civilian principals. On the other hand, the founding fathers attributed to the military a guardianship role within the newly established Republic. Hence, the First Republic was characterized by the coexistence of civilian control of the armed forces and guardianship understanding. However, primarily due to concordance between Kemalist leadership and the top brass, the military generally did not act against the preferences of civilian leadership. Until the transition to multiparty politics in the second half of the 1940s, soldiers remained largely reluctant to become involved in political debates and issues. For instance, Chief of Staff General Fevzi Cakmak generally remained loyal to M. Kemal Atatürk, and to İsmet İnönü during his long term in office (1922–1944). Succumbing to a charismatic political leadership, the military refrained from acting autonomously within the political system, operating instead as an instrument of the political leadership. As Hale observes, "Atatürk's government sought to use the army as an instrument of education, social mobilization and 'nation-building'."<sup>22</sup> Thus, the military's guardianship role was not really

actualized; rather, it remained at an ideational level. Therefore, it is fair to label military guardianship during the First Republic as *symbolic*. Put briefly, the praetorianism of the late Ottoman Empire was replaced by *symbolic* guardianship during the early Republic.

In the aftermath of the transition to multiparty politics, however, we see some signs of the military's growing interest in political matters. For instance, it is well known that when the ruling CHP lost the 1950 general election to the rising conservative Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti* [DP]), led by Adnan Menderes, a number of senior military officers approached President Inonu, who was widely respected in the army, to intervene and annul the election results. Inonu was committed to the transition to democracy and multiparty politics and denied the request.<sup>23</sup> Later in that decade, conspiratorial groups against the DP government emerged, led by relatively junior military officers. For instance, there was an alleged coup attempt, known as the Nine Officers Incident.<sup>24</sup> This increasing political activism by the military resulted in a military intervention in May 1960 that toppled the DP government. This intervention led to a new principal-agent relationship, which in turn opened a new stage in military tutelage in Turkish politics.

### *Militocracy (1960–2001)*

The 1960 military coup began a new era in Turkish civil-military relations, which was characterized by military supremacy over civilian politics. The military started to play the role of watchdog within the political system. Heper, a prominent scholar of Turkish politics, states the following, "In 1960–2002, it was always the military that had attempted to re-structure political life when it deemed it necessary."<sup>25</sup> Other than various indirect or informal incursions into the political arena, the Turkish military directly interrupted the democratic processes four times during this era (1960–61, 1971, 1980–83, and 1997). Thus, because of the military's surveillance of civilian politics and its expanded powers over the political elite, we label this period as *overt or assertive guardianship*.

Strikingly, the military's watchdog role and tutelary powers were not without legal basis. The 1924 Constitution stated that national sovereignty was "vested in the nation without reservation and condition" (Article 3). The Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* [TBMM]; Turkey's legislative body) was the only lawful representative of the nation, exercising sovereignty in the name of the nation (see Article 4). In the 1961 Constitution, however, we see telling changes related to the exercise of sovereignty in favor of the military. Article 4 of that constitution reads "Sovereignty is vested in the Turkish nation without reservation and condition. *The nation shall exercise its sovereignty through the authorized agencies as prescribed by the principles laid down in the Constitution . . .*" (emphasis added). By this statement, the 1961 Constitution simply divided sovereignty among the legislative, judicial, and executive bodies (including the military). Such a change allowed the military to exert a greater degree of influence over civilian politics.



Another well-known case of increased military influence in politics is the National Security Council established by the same constitution as part of the executive (Article 111). Bringing civilian and military leadership together, the MGK has been one of the major formal channels through which the military has played its tutelary role. The MGK was initially established as a consultative body and dominated by civilians. In the 1961 Constitution, the MGK was responsible for *providing information* to the government on matters related to national security. However, after each military intervention, the MGK increased its legal powers and the number of military members at the expense of civilians. According to the 1982 Constitution, written during the 1980–83 military regime, the MGK was to be composed of five military members (the chief of the staff and the commanders of the Army, Navy, Air force, and Gendarmerie), four members of the government (the prime minister and the ministers of defense, interior and foreign affairs), and the president (the head of state), who was the chair of the council. Considering the fact that the secretary general of the MGK was also a general, the council was clearly dominated by the military. Concerning its jurisdiction, the MGK gained authority to make decisions on various issues such as the economy, financial markets, banks, privatization and foreign policy. These decisions also started to carry more weight within the state administration. According to a 1971 amendment to the 1961 Constitution, rather than simply providing information, the MGK would *recommend* its views to the government. With the 1982 Constitution, the government had to give *priority* consideration to the decisions and recommendations of the military-dominated council (Article 118). With its substantial executive powers, the council constituted one of the legal checks on the government; however, this led to a political system with double executives: the civilian authority (the government) and the military authority (the military-dominated MGK).<sup>26</sup>

Another legal indicator of the military's tutelary role in this period was the Turkish Armed Forces' (TAF) Internal Service Law, renewed in early 1961 (i.e., during the military regime). Article 35 of this law emphasizes the duty of the military to protect and safeguard the territorial integrity and the nature of the Republic as defined in the Constitution (i.e., a secular, social Republic based on the rule of law and human rights). Such legal provisions were used frequently by military officers to legitimize their involvement in civilian politics. Thus, beginning in the early 1960s, the agent of the early Republic started to operate as the principal in Turkish polity. This changed agent–principal configuration also altered the nature of military guardianship, paving the way for a more open and assertive form.

### *Transition to Civilocracy (2001 Onward)*

In the early 2000s, Turkish governments initiated substantial and unprecedented institutional and legal changes to restrict the political powers of the military. This reform process was triggered primarily by European Union (EU) requirements. After recognizing Turkey as a candidate for full EU membership during the European

Council's Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the EU required Turkey to remove the supremacy of the military over civilian politics and place civilian control over the military in line with EU member states. This period of reform and transformation in Turkish civil–military relations is summarized in Table 1.

Along with such institutional and legal changes, further unprecedented developments in Turkish civil–military relations occurred. For example, since 2007, civilian courts have detained and tried hundreds of active-duty and retired military officers, including generals, who were accused of being involved in several coup plots against the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) government.<sup>27</sup> The most striking development in this process was the detention of former Chief of General Staff General Ilker Basbug (2008–2010) in early January 2012. The prosecutors accused Gen. Basbug of establishing and leading a terrorist organization and of plotting against the AKP government. Further, the trial of the leaders of the 1980 coup (the bloodiest intervention of the Republican period) was initiated, a symbolically important development. According to the indictment, accepted by the Ankara Twelfth High Criminal Court in early January 2012, the prosecutor seeks life imprisonment for living leaders of the 1980 intervention, Gen. Kenan Evren and Gen. Tahsin Şahinkaya. These unprecedented occurrences indicate that Turkish military has lost its untouchable status.

Furthermore, we see greater civilian involvement in the National Security Policy Document (*Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi*), known as the Red Book. This document used to be primarily prepared by the office of the chief of staff, with no involvement from the government or the parliament. Civilian members of the MGK could read the document but were not allowed to propose any revisions. This protocol has changed to a great extent in the recent period; the government is now actively involved.

Similarly, we observe greater civilian control of military promotions and appointments. During the August 2010 promotions, the civilian leadership blocked the appointment of four-star general Hasan Igsiz as army commander because of allegations that he was involved in a coup plot in 2009. Facing government's objections, the office of the chief of staff failed to promote a number of other senior officers accused of involvement in conspiracies against the government. During the 2011 appointments and promotions, the AKP government objected to the promotions of several currently arrested senior officers who have been accused of plotting coups. A series of meetings between Chief of Staff General Isik Kosaner, the prime minister and the president failed to resolve these differences. As a result, Kosaner and the commanders of the Army, Air Force, and Navy resigned, the first time commanders have resigned en masse due to a clash with civilian authority.<sup>28</sup> In the past, the military could easily get its recommendations rubber-stamped by the government, and in previous differences of opinion, the civilians would back down.

We see other novel developments with symbolic importance in terms of the civilianization process in Turkey. For instance, the seating arrangement during meetings of the High Military Council (*Yüksek Askeri Şura* [YAŞ]) has been altered. Previously, the prime minister and the chief of general staff used to sit side by side at the

**Table 1.** Constitutional and Legal Reforms in Turkish Civil–Military Relations

Type	Title	Date	Content
Constitutional Amendments		June 18, 1999	Article 143: Replaced the military judge in the State Security Courts with a civilian
		October 3, 2001	Article 118: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abrogated the priority of MGK decisions</li> <li>Put emphasis on the <i>advisory</i> nature of the MGK</li> <li>Increased the number of civilian members on the MGK by four (adding three deputy prime ministers and the minister of justice) while keeping the number of military members at five</li> </ul>
		May 7, 2004	Article 131: Removed the military member from the YÖK Article 143: Eliminated the State Security Courts Article 160: Increased the oversight of military and defense expenditures by enabling the Court of Auditors to audit them on behalf of the TBMM
		September 12, 2010	Article 125: Allowed appeals of expulsion decisions of the Supreme Military Council Article 145: Allowed civilian courts to try military officials accused of crimes against state security, the constitutional order and the functioning of this order; limited the jurisdiction of military courts to “military service and military duties” Provisional Article 15: Removed immunity for perpetrators of the 1980 military intervention
Legal Changes		December 1999	The 1913 Ottoman Civil Servants Law was repealed, ensuring that members of security forces would be held accountable for their involvement in human rights violations
	The Sixth Reform Package	July 19, 2003	The MGK representative to the Board of Inspection of Cinema, Video, and Musical Works was dropped
	The Seventh Reform Package	August 7, 2003	Several changes were made to the law of the MGK and the law of the secretary-general of the MGK (Law No. 2945): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The executive powers of the secretary general of the MGK were eliminated, while the MGK itself was reduced to an “advisory/consultative body.” The main responsibility of the secretary-general was redefined as providing secretariat duties in the MGK</li> <li>The unlimited access of the MGK to any public agency was eradicated</li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table I.** (continued)

Type	Title	Date	Content
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new secretary would no longer be a military official, but a civilian, nominated by the prime minister and appointed by the president</li> <li>• MGK meetings would be held once every two months rather than every month</li> <li>• The transparency of military and defense expenditures was increased. The Court of Auditors, upon the request of Parliament, was authorized to audit accounts and transactions of all types of organizations including state properties controlled by the armed forces</li> </ul>
		December 2003	An amendment to the Law on Public Financial Management and Control: allowed the inclusion of extra-budgetary funds in the budgets of the relevant administrations (i.e., the defense ministry as of January 1, 2005) and the dissolution of these funds by December 31, 2007
	The Eighth Reform Package	July 14, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The right of the secretary general of the MGK to nominate one member of the RTÜK was abolished (Law No. 2813, Article 6)</li> <li>• Constitutional changes (May 7, 2004) related to the Higher Education Council were reflected in the law of the same name (Law No. 2547, Article 6)</li> </ul>
		July 29, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With certain exceptions, the military courts could no longer prosecute civilians in peaceful times. (The Establishment and Trial Procedures of Military Courts Law, No: 353)</li> <li>• The principle of retrial according to the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was introduced into military courts</li> </ul>
		January 4, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The secret Protocol on Cooperation for Security and Public Order (EMASYA, 1997), which allowed the army to conduct operations and intelligence gathering to quell unrest in cities without the approval or request of civilian or local authorities, was annulled.</li> </ul>
		December 3, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The powers of the Court of Accounts to oversee the defense and security sector were enhanced through a change to the Law on the Court of Accounts (Law No. 6085)</li> </ul>
		December 1, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The military unit that was stationed on the grounds of Parliament was removed</li> </ul>

head of the table, chairing the meeting together. Now the prime minister sits alone, which is interpreted as a sign of enhanced civilian control of the military. There is also a new seating arrangement during meetings of the MGK. Rather than each side sitting in a block facing each other, civilians and military officers now sit on both sides of the table, in accordance with state protocol. Moreover, the controversial April 27, 2007, e-memorandum, which sent a harsh warning to the government about the presidential elections, was removed from the website of the office of the chief of general staff in late August 2011 (more discussion on this to follow). Another emblematic step in 2011 toward civilianization occurred when President Abdullah Gul hosted Turkey's Victory Day celebrations (August 30); these used to be hosted by the chief of staff.

What do all these developments mean? One might argue that these changes mark a major step forward in the civilianization of Turkish civil–military relations. Since the early 2000s, civilian actors and bodies (i.e., the government, the parliament and the courts) have enhanced their control over the military. As a result, the role of the military within the political system has substantially declined. To put it in principal–agent terms, the civilians and the military have switched positions. The old principal (the military) has become the new agent, and the old agent (the political elites) is the new principal.

If we see a shift of the balance of power toward civilians and the demotion of the military into a secondary position, how does this process affect military guardianship? Are the generals ready or reluctant to relinquish their guardianship role? Heper notes that “[I]t seems from 2002 onwards, the High Command has arrived at the conclusion that the military should no longer play a guardian role even if in its view civilians made a ‘mess of things’.”<sup>29</sup> Despite that comment, the military appears divided on this matter. It is true that some of the military openly questions the wisdom of intervening in civilian politics. For instance, former Chief of Staff Gen. Hilmi Özkök (2002–2006) once stated that:

The military intervened on May 27 [1960], March 12 [1971], and September 12 [1980]. Were these interventions successful? No! If they had been successful, politicians who had been banned from active politics could not have been able to return to politics. Those who were banned from politics later became even prime ministers and/or the president of the republic. This shows that military interventions are not a panacea. From now on we should have greater trust in the people's judgment.<sup>30</sup>

However, it seems that another group still subscribes to the guardianship mentality. For instance, during the handover ceremony in August 2006, incoming Chief of Staff General Yasar Buyukanit reminded civilians that “[p]rotecting the fundamental principles of the Republic [i.e. secularism, nationalism, a unitary state] is not an issue of domestic politics. Rather, it is the duty of the military.”<sup>31</sup> A striking example of this mentality was the military's involvement in the presidential elections of April 2007. When the ruling AKP nominated Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül as its

candidate for president, the military reacted harshly because it is believed that Gul, whose wife wears a headscarf, has roots in political Islam. In other words, the military perceived his nomination as a serious threat to the secular nature of the Republic. On April 27, the office of the chief of staff sent a warning to the government from its website:

The problem that has emerged in the presidential election process is focused on arguments over secularism. The Turkish Armed Forces are highly concerned about the recent situation. *It should not be forgotten that the Turkish Armed Forces are a party to those arguments, and an absolute defender of secularism. . . . It will display its attitude and action openly and clearly whenever it is necessary. No one should doubt this. . . . It is the legal responsibility and duty of the Turkish Armed Forces to protect the secular and unitary nature of the Republic. The Turkish Armed Forces are strongly dedicated to fulfilling this duty* (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, during the August 2008 inauguration ceremony, incoming Chief of Staff Gen. Ilker Basbug declared, “The notions of a unitary nation state and secularism were defined as the founding principles of the Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Turkish Armed Forces will always be responsible for protecting and preserving these principles.”<sup>33</sup> Kosaner, successor to Basbug, repeated this message during the August 2010 handover. Stating that Kemalism will continue to be the guiding principle of the military, Kosaner emphasized that “the Turkish Armed Forces are legally responsible for protecting and preserving the independence of the Turkish nation, the indivisibility of the nation and the state, the Republic and democracy. The Turkish Armed Forces have been and will be the defender and protector of the principles of the unitary and secular nation state.”<sup>34</sup> Another example of the guardianship mindset was the military’s reaction to the call by the pro-Kurdish Democracy and Peace Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* [BDP]) for bilingualism in Turkey’s southeast (i.e., greater use of the Kurdish language in every realm of public life) in December 2010. The office of the chief of staff stated that “[t]he Turkish Staff has always been and will continue to be party to the protection of the unitary, nation state and the principle of secularism.”<sup>35</sup> In late August 2011, former Chief of Staff Kosaner’s voice recording from a private military meeting was released on the Internet. Kosaner confirmed the authenticity of the leaked recordings, which stated:

They [the civilians] say that they would abolish Article 35 or bring in another one. It does not matter. They can either keep it or abolish it. *We, as the Turkish Armed Forces, exist for that purpose [to protect and guard the territorial integrity and the secular Republic]. This is our natural and historical duty. Nobody can advise us on that issue; nobody can oppose this either* (emphasis added).<sup>36</sup>

The above remarks suggest that despite the major changes and developments in Turkish civil–military relations since the early 2000s, at least one group within the

**Table 2.** The Evolution of Military Guardianship in Turkey

Period	Civilians	Military	Regime	Guardianship
I: 1924–1960	Principal	Agent	Civilocracy	Symbolic
II: 1960–2001	Agent	Principal	Militocracy	Overt (Assertive)
III: 2000 onward	Principal	Agent	Civilocracy	Post-guardianship

military still views and presents the military as the guardian of Kemalist principles and the Republic. Evident from the remarks above, tutelary understanding is still strong among certain sections of the military. This, however, does not mean that the assertive guardianship of the twentieth century lingers in Turkish politics. Although some members of the military maintain a tutelary notion, it remains at a rhetorical level. In other words, the pro-guardianship group does not take open and direct action against civilian authority. For instance, although the military leadership attempted to prevent Gul's election, they backed down after it occurred. Similarly, rather than escalating the tension, Gen. Kosaner chose to resign after clashing with the civilian leadership over the military promotions. From these examples, one might interpret that the developments since the early 2000s, which have relegated the military to a secondary position within the state apparatus are signs of a shift to a post-guardianship era in the Turkish Republic. (See Table 2 for a summary of the path of Turkey's civil–military relations).

## Final Discussion

Approaching civil–military relations from the perspective of the principal–agent framework, this study has shown that the path of Turkish civil–military relations has involved various principal–agent configurations. In the early Republic, the military generally acted as the loyal agent of the civilian principals. However, beginning in the early 1960s, the military became the new principal. Such shifts also altered the nature of military guardianship in the sense that symbolic guardianship of the early Republic was replaced by a more overt and assertive form. Since the early 2000s, however, we see unprecedented reforms and changes designed to limit the political powers of the military. One might interpret these changes as the early signs of a transition to a post-guardianship era in Turkish politics.

One implication of the above analyses is related to the guardianship phenomenon. In line with several studies drawing attention to the guardianship role of the Turkish military, this study also acknowledges that military tutelage has been one of the tenacious features of the Turkish political system. Embracing a Platonic mission (i.e., viewing itself as the guardian of the Kemalist regime and national and state interests), the Turkish military has intervened in civilian politics whenever it deemed necessary. To put it in principal–agent terms, agency losses have been common practice in the Turkish political context. However, the extant literature tends to treat

military guardianship as something uniform and static.<sup>37</sup> This assumption is rather problematic because, as shown above, different forms or types of military guardianship have been present in the Turkish political system. We have argued that such an intriguing variance is a result of the dynamic nature of the principal–agent relationship in Turkish civil–military relations. Hence, as there may be other examples of such dynamic relationships, students of civil–military relations should avoid approaches reifying military guardianship.

Another controversial orientation in the literature is that military guardianship is treated as a dichotomous phenomenon; that is, as either present or absent in the polity. This study, however, implies that military guardianship is a dynamic, continuous variable, not a binary, discrete one because other than gaining different appearances, military’s political autonomy has been present at varying levels in Turkish politics. In other words, it has been a matter of “degree,” increasing or decreasing across time. For this reason, we should ignore dichotomous conceptualizations and rather employ approaches treating military tutelage as a dynamic, evolving, and continuous variable.

With respect to the prospects of Turkish civil–military relations, there has been an interesting cyclical pattern in the path of Turkish civil–military relations thus far. As depicted in Table 2 above, a period characterized by civilian supremacy and effective civilian control (civilocracy) has been succeeded by a period of military supremacy and autonomy (militocracy). Given this pattern, the recent developments in Turkish civil–military relations raise the following important questions: Will this new phase terminate the cyclical nature of Turkish civil–military relations? To ask differently, do we see an irreversible trend toward civilocracy? How likely is it that the military will remain the loyal agent of the civilian principals? We posit that the answer to such questions depends on three factors: *political and economic stability*, *the military’s organizational culture*, and *civilian attitudes*.

Political and economic stability and efficiency are important because during times of political and/or economic crises or weaknesses, certain sections of Turkish society tend to turn to the military.<sup>38</sup> However, political and economic stability would restrict the influence of interventionist circles in society and within the military. This situation, in turn, would facilitate continued civilian control of the military, consolidating the post-guardianship era in the country. For this reason, economic well-being and the popularity of political processes and actors should be taken into account when assessing the prospects of civil–military relations in Turkey.

With respect to the second factor, several studies suggest that the internalization of the norm of civilian supremacy by military officers is crucial for civilian control of the armed forces.<sup>39</sup> In the Turkish case, achieving this requires a substantial overhaul of its military training and education. Ex-officer and ex-politician Orhan Erkanlı, for instance, observes:

The method of training for Turkish officers is not at all like that in other armies. Being an officer in other armies is just a professional job, like any other form of state service.



		Military (A)	
		Work	Shirk
Civilians (P)	Work	Q2 <i>Objective control</i>	Q1 <i>Friction</i>
	Shirk	Q3 <i>Subjective control</i>	Q4 <i>Political disorder</i>

**Figure 3.** Work-shirk configurations in a civil–military context.

*With us, however, it is much more than just a job, it is a national duty, it is the Guardianship of the State (emphasis added).*<sup>40</sup>

This statement also implies that Turkey’s military training appears to be one of the factors sustaining the military’s Platonic mission within the political system. Therefore, as former Chief of Staff Ozkok also mentioned, changing the military’s mentality through reforming military education and training appears to be a necessity to achieve a higher degree of civilian supremacy.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Toktas and Kurt state:

DECAF [democratic control of armed forces] requires a new military culture that would breed respect for civilian control. The Turkish version of DECAF refers to a listing of institutional reforms and amendments to existing laws. In a broader sense what the EU reforms have asked for regarding the military is that there should be a fundamental revolution of the military’s mindset, which requires that the military’s historical and conventional role to protect the country and the expansive interpretation of its mission should be redefined more narrowly.<sup>42</sup>

From these statements, it can be understood that, along with political and economic stability, the transformation of the military’s organizational culture would reduce the likelihood of a return to a new form of guardianship in the Turkish political system.

The final issue regarding the prospect of civil–military relations in Turkey is related to civilian attitudes. The principal–agent framework tends to assume that only the agent would shirk (as discussed above, this means not working as directed) while the principal is assumed always to “work.” However, both parties may engage in shirking behavior. As applied to civil–military relations and presented in Figure 3,

this assumption creates four possible configurations. In the first quadrant, civilian principals act responsibly but the military shirks, which would naturally lead to friction between civilian and military leaderships. In the second state, the principal and the agent act appropriately, which would result in effective civilian control of the military, regarded as a healthy condition. This state corresponds to Huntington's "objective control," which involves: (a) a high level of military professionalism and recognition by military officers of the limits of their professional competence; (b) the effective subordination of the military to civilian leadership; (c) the recognition and acceptance by civilian leadership of the military's professional competence and autonomy in its area; and (d) the minimization of military intervention in politics and of political intervention in the military.<sup>43</sup> These features require mutual understanding and respect between the military and civilian leaderships.

In the third quadrant, the military works (i.e., follows civilian orders and instructions), while the civilian principal shirks. How is that possible? Civilians may give insufficient direction or ambiguous guidance to the military<sup>44</sup> or violating military traditions and professionalism, the civilian leadership might promote military officers based on political considerations rather than merit. Furthermore, civilians might use the military to advance partisan interests or the interests of certain civilian groups rather than national causes and interests. Huntington would define such civilian behaviors and attitudes as instances of "subjective control." Using his words, "the essence of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism; the essence of subjective civilian control is the denial of an independent military sphere."<sup>45</sup> For Huntington, subjective control does not favor national security because it undermines military professionalism, which is vital for the protection of national interests. Moreover, subjective control, which involves disrespect for the military and its traditions, might not only politicize the military but also erode its confidence in civilian actors and politics, both of which are disadvantageous to national security. Within the delegation chain in a democratic system of rule, the people delegate authority to the civilians, while civilians delegate authority to the military. As agents of the people, civilians are expected to serve national interests. However by undermining national security and interests in their relations with the military, the civilians could indirectly shirk their obligations to the people.

An important and challenging question asks, under what conditions is principal shirking more or less likely in the civil–military context? One possible answer is that if the military agent and the civilian principals have sharp ideological differences, hostility is likely to emerge, which would increase the likelihood of military and civilian shirking. In other words, due to ideological tension or conflict, civilians might develop an inimical attitude vis-à-vis the military agent, which may undermine the ability of the military to fulfill its tasks.

Turkish civil–military relations are rife with such clashes and tension between the secular military and conservative political circles. As a result, the military openly complains about an antagonistic attitude toward it. For instance, during a press conference in late June 2009, the then Chief of Staff Gen. Basbug reacted to coup

allegations stating that certain civilian circles were involved in an organized, systematic campaign aimed at discrediting and defaming the Turkish Armed Forces. The goal, Basbug argued, was to stir up, divide, and weaken the military. He harshly stated, “As the commander of the armed forces, I am telling you very clearly: Take your hands off the armed forces and stop defining your political position over the armed forces. Stop carrying out an asymmetrical psychological campaign against the armed forces through the media.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Kosaner’s farewell message to the military in late July 2011 questioned the legitimacy of the detention of hundreds of military officials by arguing that the trials of coup plots involved several judicial flaws such as weak or forged evidence and long-term detentions without a verdict.

Regardless of whether such allegations are correct, the statements show that at least some officials perceive that civilians (e.g., media, judiciary, politicians) have a virulent attitude vis-à-vis the military. This perception highlights a serious problem because if the military agent does not really trust the civilian principals, it is extremely difficult to establish a sound principal–agent relationship, and can erode national security and interests.

In the fourth quadrant, both sides are involved in shirking, which does not constitute a functioning principal–agent relationship. In civil–military relations, such a situation may lead to a security vacuum and political disorder, which might ultimately result in state failure. Three of the four configurations presented above correspond to unhealthy civil–military relations (work–work is the healthy state), and are likely to endanger the security of a political system. To avoid such an outcome, military and civilian leaderships must act responsibly. As Bland also suggests, “. . . civil control of the military is managed and maintained through the sharing of responsibility for control between civilian leaders and military officers.”<sup>47</sup> Hence, while assessing the prospects of Turkish civil–military relations, we must also take civilian attitudes and behaviors into account.

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## Notes

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  11. Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 68.
  12. See also Anton Bebler, "Typologies Based on Civilian-Dominated Versus Military-Dominated Political System," in *Contemporary Political Systems: Classifications and Typologies*, ed. Anton Bebler and Jim Seroka (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990), 261-75.
  13. Students of Turkish civil-military relations observe that such relations have already entered a new era. It is a commonly held view that civilians have substantially enhanced their control over the interventionist military. However, we see disagreements about how to conceptualize this new period. One group treats the recent period as further democratization. Another group, which is more skeptical, argues that civilianization is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratization. It is asserted that although civilian control of the military has been enhanced in the Turkish political system, there are still several problems with Turkish democracy. Drawing attention to issues related to freedom of press, freedom of expression, minority rights, judicial independence, and the rule of law,

skeptics tend to consider the recent period as a power struggle between the secular military and conservative circles rather than further democratization. It is believed that conservative circles, which experienced the wrath of the strongly secular military in the past, have revengeful attitudes vis-à-vis the military. Thus, the skeptics consider the recent trials of military officers as politically motivated. This study is not really interested in the accuracy of these competing views. However, in order to avoid any polemical debate, this work opted for the concepts of “civilocracy” and “civilianization,” which seem to be less controversial than concepts of “democracy” and “democratization” in contemporary Turkish politics.

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23. Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, 92-93.
24. For further discussion on this, see Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, 88-118.
25. Heper, “Civil-Military Relations in Turkey,” 248.
26. See also Sakallioğlu, “The Anatomy of the Turkish Military’s Autonomy,” 158.
27. As of December 2011, nearly 250 active-duty and retired military officers were charged with conspiracy against the government. The number of generals and admirals arrested was 139. Eighty-one of those had already retired, and fifty-eight generals were in active duty, which corresponds to 15 percent of the generals within the Turkish military.
28. A similar development took place in 1990 due to a clash between military and civilian leadership over foreign policy issues. The civilian side, led by President Ozal, defended a more active role for Turkey in the Gulf War (1990–1991), while the military leadership had some reservations. In the end, in early December, Chief of Staff Necip Torumtay resigned, which was interpreted as a protest of civilian policies regarding the conflict. Such incidents have been extremely rare in Turkish civil–military relations. For more on this incident, see Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, 291-95.
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30. Quoted in Metin Heper, “The Justice and Development Party Government and the Military in Turkey,” *Turkish Studies* 6, 2 (2005): 217.

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33. The speech is available at: [http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_7\\_Konusmalar/2008/org\\_ilkerbasbug\\_dvrtslkonusmasi\\_28082008.html](http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_7_Konusmalar/2008/org_ilkerbasbug_dvrtslkonusmasi_28082008.html), (accessed January 18, 2010).
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35. The statement is available at: [http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Aciklamalari/2010/BA\\_03.htm](http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2010/BA_03.htm) (accessed December 18, 2010).
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38. See also Jenkins, "Continuity and Change," 339.
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40. Quoted in Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, 83.
41. See Heper, "The Justice and Development Party Government and the Military in Turkey," 217.
42. Sule Toktas and Umit Kurt, "The Turkish Military's Autonomy, JDP Rule and the EU Reform Process in the 2000s," 401.
43. Samuel P. Huntington, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Democracy* 6, 4 (1995): 9-17. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory of Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).
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