

# **Social Construction of Power in Turkish Democratic System: Turkish Armed Forces and Its Perceived Power**

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## **Abstract**

Theories of social construction are involved in a range of suppositions about the origin of social phenomenon disseminating in various social contexts. Within different conceptualizations of power and power relations between actors, Barnesian analysis argues that the socially constructed knowledge that is distributed over the society dictates the extent of the power relationship – creating an expectation from the actors involved. The knowledge that is embedded, and accepted by the individuals becomes the reality simply because it is articulated as being real – self-fulfilling its promise. The role of the military in Turkish politics bears the aspect of socially constructed power in relation to the state, especially since the military intervention of 1960 and the subsequent role of the military in Turkish state affairs. It is argued throughout the paper that the reasons of the intervention included that the military establishment was expected to intervene – regardless of their intention – based on the accepted knowledge that the Armed Forces were powerful; a knowledge that was embedded and self-fulfilled its own assertion throughout the years.

## **Keywords**

Social construction, Power, Political power, Turkey, Contemporary Turkish Politics, Turkish Armed Forces

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## Introduction

The role of the military in Turkish democratic system has been articulated, contested, revised, and argued throughout the history of modern Turkey in a variety of ways within different periods. Indeed, the functions of the Armed Forces<sup>1</sup> in Turkish social and political life – its perceived value put upon the body politic and its embraced identity by the society – has been a crucial point of argument for scholars and students, as well as the overall society. Perhaps, it would be even acceptable to say that the Turkish Armed Forces has been at the centre of political and social discourses across the decades that followed the foundation of the Republic up to modern day.

Similar to the role of the Army in Turkish politics, the notion of *power* has been at the centre of political and social studies for the past millennia. Indeed, the topic of power as a social construct is highly debated and argued within the political science field, some even arguing that the study of power *is* the study of politics itself. Correspondingly, the study of *social power* as a pervasive concept is similarly much debated and attracted the attention of many philosophers and social scientists alike.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Bertrand Russell;

The fundamental concept in social science is Power in the sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics. Like energy, power has many forms, such as wealth, armaments,

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<sup>1</sup> Turkish Armed Forces, Turkish Military, the Military, and the Army will be used interchangeably throughout the essay.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Blais, "Power and Causality" *Quality and Quantity* (8), 1974, pp. 45-64. For analysis of the topic of power in social science see also Pollard and Mitchell, "Decision Theory Analysis of Social Power" *Psychological Bulletin*, 78 (6), 1972, pp.433-446

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influence on opinion. No one of these can be regarded as subordinate to any other, and there is no form from which the others are derivable.<sup>3</sup>

Following the vitality of *power* as a concept in relation to the discipline, the study will focus on social and political power as a socially constructed notion. It will further attempt to analyse the implications of the theoretical claims by taking the role of Turkish Military as an example – examining the *power of the Armed Forces*. The first section of the paper will survey the key literature on the subject of power in reference to theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The Barnesian view of social power will be reviewed and explained at the end of the section, ending it after drawing a hypothesis. The second section will, relatively, analyse the Turkish Army's intervention of 1960 based on the hypothesis put forward and further examine if socially constructed power was a reason that prompted the coup d'état. The socially constructed power of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) will additionally be examined in different periods; during the intervention of 1980 and further in light of the recent events.

It is important to note here that this modest undertaking is not intended to provide an extensive investigation on the concept of political or social power. Neither will it argue for a radically different understanding of the Army's role in Turkish democratic life. The aim of the paper is to simply provide an *additional* reasoning on the complex nature of military-society-state association in Turkey. Perhaps it will be possible to argue that socially derived power played a role during the military interventions of the 1960 and 1980, but an exhaustive analytical causation will not be claimed – at least not until a more substantial analysis has been made.

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<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Power: A new social analysis*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1938, p.10.

## **Social Constructs, Theories of Power, and Barnes' Concept of Power Based on Socially Constructed Knowledge**

It seems rather unwise to start with an argument on social construction of power without briefly explaining what it is meant by social construct and without going over conceptual alternatives and epistemological positions taken on *power*. The concept of social construction is, in its most basic form, refers to notions, thoughts, and theories that are shaped by the social forces in a given society. To say that something is “socially constructed” means that it is perceived in a specific way, built in a distinct way based on societal structures – i.e. values and norms.<sup>4</sup> Socially constructed convictions, therefore, are not independent natural objects but depend on social prospects.<sup>5</sup> The knowledge that humans hold are created – constructed – and further sustained or modified from the perspective of the people who live in it subjectively – bearing similarities to interpretivist ideals.<sup>6</sup> Social constructions may range from “brotherhood” “international relations” to “women refugees”.<sup>7</sup> – A list that is virtually impossible to limit.

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Hacking, *Social Construction of What?* London: Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Boghossian “What is Social Construction?” University of New York – Arts and Sciences lecture series paper <http://as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1153/socialconstruction.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schwandt, *Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretativism, hermeneutics and social constructionism*. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and issues*, pp. 292-331. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 2003

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis on social construction of international relations, see Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: Social Construction of Power Politics” *International Organization*, 46 (2), 1992, pp. 391-425.

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Conceptualisation on social and political power, as a social construct, is heavily debated within the discipline (and it would not be possible to take into account every single approach to the study of power) but a few stands out as the most contentious theorizations that share similar themes and notions. Jonathan Hearn, on distinguishing between physical and social power notes:

We need to be able to distinguish clearly between power in the *physical sense* of energy embedded in substances and power in the *social sense* of the coordination and mobilization of human feelings, thoughts, and actions towards ends... the latter involves a constant readiness for action, and a system of relations in which messages affecting those actions can flow in multiple directions.<sup>8</sup>

Hearn's articulation simply argues that it is crucial to differentiate social power from the general notions of physical exercise of power. In a similar fashion, Michael Mann suggests that societies are composed of separate but overlapping power networks, where social power is stems from political, ideological, economic, and military relationships.<sup>9</sup> He goes on to defend these "relationships" as "overlapping networks of social interactions" – emphasizing an underlying mechanism as a *relationship*, a mutual interaction between agents.<sup>10</sup> Social power originates in the context of a relationship that is also akin to a mutual expectation –

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Hearn, *Theorizing Power*, London: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp 4-5

<sup>9</sup> Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. For an analysis of Mann's sources of social power on Turkey, see Tim Jacoby, *Social Power and the Turkish State*, New York: Frank Cass, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Clegg, *The Theory of Power and Organization*, London&Boston: Routledge, 1979. See also, Steven Lukes, *Power*, in *Readings in Social and Political Theory*, New York: University Press 1986.

a supposition of (prospective) action from the opposite side. The pivotal underlying mechanism is that a shared *knowledge* between the actors involved shape and form the nature of the relationship.

Following a comparable theory of socially derived knowledge, Barry Barnes explains his famous concept of social and political power as a function of the *distributed knowledge* over the society. He focuses on knowledge as the key factor on shaping the power relations between actors in a relationship – whatever the knowledge dictates becomes the “truth” that power is bound to.

Power, that is to say social power, must be an aspect or a characteristic of a distribution of knowledge.... any specific distribution of knowledge confers a generalized capacity for action upon those individuals who carry and constitute it, and that capacity for action is their social power, the power of the society they constitute by bearing and sharing the knowledge in question... social power is identified as a distribution of *knowledge* – not of mere individual *belief*. Knowledge is accepted belief, generally held belief, belief routinely implicated in social action.<sup>11</sup>

Barnes recognizes the difference between belief and knowledge, arguing that *what a society knows determines the nature of the social power over them*. It is not what an individual *believes*, it is what he *knows* – or he thinks he knows – that defines the power of an agent over him. In the context of social construction, what an individual knows seems as if it is externally imposed; it is an independent thought that is distributed over the society, hence everyone in a society constitute the knowledge together. Individuals within a society construct a given notion as “knowledge” and act coherently together by taking the knowledge as their basis. In short, power is

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<sup>11</sup> Barry Barnes, *The Nature of Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 50-60

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constituted by “what people know, and knowledge is not a private mental state, but rather a collective phenomenon”.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the most crucial point of Barnes’ claim of power that is self-referring and self-validating. In its most basic form, the idea asserts that the distributed knowledge over the society increases in scope by *being reinforced over and over*. An object of truth, a reality, is constituted by being referred and accepted as such and “the possibility of an object’s being affected by the way it is conceived or thought to be”.<sup>13</sup> A notion that is articulated by an actor, or a collective, has the essential quality of becoming “real” by the fact that *it is* being expressed as real – either consciously or subconsciously. Ideals, judgments, assumptions or values are constitutively contribute to the reality in social sciences, and “what is conceived to be real, also tends to become real”.<sup>14</sup> For instance, if someone is called a leader in a group, it is not because it is a naturally occurring reality, but because it is the understanding that he *is* the leader – the knowledge of him being the leader is distributed inside the group. Therefore, the members of the group constitute his leadership through the acceptance of this knowledge.

It is argued, accordingly, that the knowledge over a society determines the nature of the power relationship. Between persons themselves, or between the society and an institution, the existence of a power relation – not the exercise of power per se – creates a foundation of expectation. Not simply coercion or threat of exercise of social power, but *the presence of power relations* facilitates an expectation, bounding the actors by the *potential* of influence.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Hearn, p.86.

<sup>13</sup> Daya Krishna, The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and the Nature of Society. *American Sociological Review*. 36 (6), 1971, pp. 1104-1107.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.1105.

<sup>15</sup> J.R FrenchJr., and B.H Raven, B. H. *The bases of social power*. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for

It is that *potentiality* that gives knowledge its shaping capacity because a *potential* becomes to be *known* throughout the collective society and validates itself as such *over* them.

Carl Friedrich refers to Rule of Anticipated Reactions (RAR) and non-decisions (or suppression of actions) taken by actors, caused by their *expectation and perception* that the “other” is more powerful and will be able to block the attempt anyways.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the outcome is deliberately or involuntarily the same.<sup>17</sup> The idea behind RAR is that the reaction of the other side is anticipated by the socially reinforced knowledge, which means that power is not exercised per se, but it is expected that *it would*. Relations of social power [over individuals or over the collective] are the product of social knowledge that reaffirms itself by its distribution. Subsequently, the actions of individuals (or collectives) are determined by the expectations created within the framework of power relations, which - in a society - are encompassed by an *institution of expectation*.

In short, the Barnesian view of power claims that actors in a relationship would act according to what they know. They place a constraint on the opposite side by *expecting* that they would act a certain way. Based on the circulated knowledge, someone (or some

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Social Research. 1959, pp. 150-167

<sup>16</sup> Carl Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Politics*. New York: Harper, 1937.

See also Terence Ball, “Power, Causation, and Explanation” *Polity* 9(2) 1976, pp.189-214.

<sup>17</sup> P. Bachrach and M. Baratz, (1962) *Two Faces of Power*, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 56, 1962, pp. 947-52. See also F. Butler and M. Zelditch, “A Test of the Law of Anticipated Reactions” *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 51(2), 1988, pp.164-171 and also Gregory Roy, “Local Elections and the Rule of Anticipated Reactions”, *Political Studies*, 17(1), 1969.



group) is thought to be powerful when in reality this may simply be untrue.

A crucial point in this line of reasoning is that the anticipation and expectation stemming from a power relationship is mutual and applies to both actors. In other words, claiming that in a social domain A has power over B is not an immediate concern or the point of analysis. Rather A and B are in a power relationship, which bounds and determines *both* of their actions based on the expectation placed upon both of them by the opposite side. Not because A is powerful and hence B's actions are determined and coerced into compliance, but instead A is also bounded in its action by the expectation put upon. The better way to further clarify the argument and test its notions would be to engage in a case study. Here, Turkish military coup d'état of 1960 and the power relations within the context of the event will illustrate the argument's claim.

### **Distribution of Knowledge and the Power of the Turkish Military during the 1960s Intervention**

Polanyi argued that the power of Stalin stemmed from the social knowledge of *him being powerful* distributed over the society. He argues that the fact that everybody feared Stalin and obeyed him was because “[men] are forced to obey by the mere supposition of the others’ continued obedience”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the knowledge that was circulated confirmed its own validity, regardless of being actually true or not, and the social

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Polanyi *Personal Knowledge*. London:Routledge, 1958, pp. 224-225.

power “at any point was constituted by knowledge everywhere”.<sup>19</sup> So the society was expected to obey Stalin because everyone in the society expected that everybody else would – hence it became a reality. Since Stalin had power over the individuals – and the society as a collective – *everyone was bound to obey*.

Turkish Armed Forces’ (TAF) intervention in 1960 and its subsequent administration had many themes and characteristics throughout the process indicating the role of the self-validating nature of distributed knowledge and expectations placed amongst those involved with the coup, the government, and the society. Indeed, based on the disseminated knowledge, the expectation put upon the military establishment and the armed forces, the expectations put upon the government, and what was anticipated from the society determined their actions to an extent that any other outcome was almost inevitable.

After a single-party period of some 30 years, multiple parties were allowed to run in 1950 general elections and the centre-right *Demokrat Parti* (DP) won a landslide victory and young and dynamic Adnan Menderes became the PM, remaining quite popular for the next 2 elections (of 54 and 57). However, by introducing controversial regulations, such as changing of the Call to Prayer from Turkish to Arabic and adopting other contentious social policies, DP came to be known as “anti-secular”.<sup>20</sup> In the meantime, tensions between DP and the opposition Republican People’s Party (RPP) was at all time high – led by openly suppressive tendencies of the incumbent government. The

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<sup>19</sup> Barry Barnes B. “Power” In Bellamy, R. 1993. *Theories and Concepts of Politics: An Introduction*. New York:Manchester University Press, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Weiker, *The Turkish Revolution 1960-1961: Aspects of Military Politics*. Washington:Brookings Institution Press, 1963. See also Weiker, *The Modernization of Turkey: From Atatürk to the Present Day*. New York: Holmes, 1981.

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tensions at the end of 1959 turned into a number of violent conflicts throughout the country, especially during the protests taken up against the incumbent government. The social unrest was fueled by economic problems and finally "betrayal of [secular] Kemalism, restrictions press freedom against the opposition, led to the end of the first multi-party democracy" and the Turkish Armed Forces publicly announced that it took over the control of the state in May 1960, adopting the name NUC – National Unity Committee.<sup>21</sup> It is crucial mention here that this brief analysis here is not an examination of "reasons of the coup" but rather an inspection of the event to point out the role of the social power infused by social knowledge over the actors involved. There are, indeed, many reasons that alternatively explain the 60's intervention, including the claim that RPP and Inonu instigated the officers, or that the mid-level officers were planning it from early on without the support of their superiors. Perhaps crucially, it is argued that TAF exercised its physical power to bring stability to the nation. To reiterate, this essay does not deny the existence of such reasons, but simply intends to open a discussion on socially induced power – and how that had an impact on the power relations between the actors in Turkish democratic system as well.

Armed Forces and the NUC they created was bounded by *the expectation that they would intervene*, which was – in theory – the knowledge that was distributed. This notion would come with several assumptions that need justification. The first is that the *TAF did not intend to intervene*. This may have been arguably the case. When the takeover occurred in late May 1960, the participants were quite inefficient and unorganised, did not even had a leader and the powers of the committee were not clear for a long time –

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<sup>21</sup> Hikmet Ozdemir, 'The Turkish American Relations Towards 1960 Turkish 'Revolution''. *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 31, 2002. pp.160-181

until at least a few months into the coup.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the NUC was divided within and the factions did not clearly communicate or got along.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, taking over a country with a population of 60 million, toppling a government of 500 MPs, a well-thought plan would have been prepared well in advance, elaborated, articulated, and put into action. But an amateur seizure of power from a historically distinguished Armed Force indicates that it was not organized as an intended action. Although it is argued that the coup was actually prepared, but simply poorly put together, the “expectation that the Army would step in” was nevertheless visible. It was arguably the case that the military establishment and the mid-rank officers, who were frustrated with the system and the incumbent government, wanted to increase the army’s influence and nothing more.<sup>24</sup> The intervention itself was not intended, but was a product of snowballing incidents. The society in general, and the government alike, constructed – if not constructed, definitely reiterated – the knowledge that they *would* and *could* intervene. Therefore, at the least, the distributed knowledge had *some* impact on the actions of the Armed Forces.

Moreover, the knowledge that was spread over the Parliament at the time, as well as the power relations within that context between the opposition party and the DP indicate together that embedded knowledge played a vital role in relation to the actors’ involvement with each other. A year before the intervention, the PM assigned the military officers around the country to suppress demonstrations and party conferences held by

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<sup>22</sup> Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*. London: Tauris, 2004, pp. 241-243.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Zürcher, p. 243.

<sup>24</sup> George Harris, “The Causes of the 1960 Revolution in Turkey”. *Middle East Journal*, 24 (4), 1970, p.442.

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the opposition.<sup>25</sup> There were violent clashes between the supporters of the two parties increasingly happening all around the country, and the non-interventionist stance of the Armed Forces was waning inevitably day-by-day. The PM was looking to secure the support of the Army for the duration of the crises, which was not well received at all since the Army had an historical, emotional bond with the opposition party and its leader.<sup>26</sup> Subsequently, after the PM's orders were outright rejected by the Armed Forces, he came to *speculate* that Mr. Inonu [leader of the opposition] and the Armed Forces were “working together to topple the government”.<sup>27</sup> The opposition party, in response, came to know that they needed to persuade the army to be on “their side” in order to stop DP from continuing its tyranny. The Armed Forces, consequently, was driven into the sociopolitical conflict and “could not escape a crisis of conscience, to carry out the directives of the DP government, or in effect side with the opposition”.<sup>28</sup>

The Armed Forces was forced into the quarrel between the political parties present, because of the idea – or the perception – that they were powerful enough to secure the other's downfall. It is important to note here that the Armed Forces secured its position as a non-political institution years before that, trying very hard to instill that identity over time.<sup>29</sup> However, they were expected to play a role in the balance of power, and even further, play a decisive role for the future of the state of affairs. Following that expectation, Turkish Armed Forces stuck to their given

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<sup>25</sup> Cihat Goktepe, “1960 ‘Revolution’ in Turkey and the British Policy Towards Turkey”. *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 30, 2000, p. 139-188

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.155.

<sup>27</sup> Mehmet Ali Birand, Can Dündar, Bülent Çaplı, *Demirkırat; Bir Demokrasinin Doğuşu*, Istanbul, Milliyet, 1995, p. 26

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Harris, pp.450-451

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Harris, p.451.

responsibility and declared the Republic of Turkey under their control on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1960.

After the intervention, the National Unity Committee publication that outlined the rationale behind the takeover [which they labeled as “revolution”] stated that the Committee had no choice but to intervene and it was borne out of “the honourable emotional excitement harboured by the society”.<sup>30</sup> Assuredly, the coup was welcomed and received with excitement and happiness from the large majority as good news.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, after the coup, junta trials were put together by the NUC in order to find those guilty of crimes that put the state in that situation.<sup>32</sup> The primary individuals within that frame of the intervention included the President, the PM, the Ministers, and the Armed Forces personnel (the designated Chief and the Officers). It is crucial to ask: how did the knowledge that was distributed over those individuals confine their actions? The tribunal installed by the military detained some 400 MPs as well as the Cabinet; the sub-question that will help me with my argument is *why did they not contest?* Why did the PM – who was arguably the Leader of the most successful [even until today] political party in Turkish political history – did not challenge the power of the NUC? As a matter of fact, he was the popularly elected minister and the members of the junta government were simply the self-declared interim government. Indeed, members of the junta were quite concerned about the reaction from the PM. Chief Prosecutor and other members of the junta tribunal installed by the Junta government “feared that the PM, who ran the country for 10 years,

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<sup>30</sup>*Official Brochure on the Revolutionary Yassıada Trials*, October 1960. National Unity Committee Bureau: Istanbul (accessed from <http://www.gereklitarama.com/yassıada-brosuru-2/>)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Harris, p.454. See also Yakup Karaosmanoglu, *45 Years in Politics [Politikada 45 Yıl]*. Ankara: Bilgi Press, 1968.

<sup>32</sup> Erik Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*. London: Tauris, 2004, p. 247.

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would not recognise the court's legitimacy" and they "would not even know how to answer to that".<sup>33</sup> However, the knowledge distributed over the individuals was that the tribunal *was* legitimate, it *was* to be accepted. The junta government was seen as the *vox populi* gaining their authority from the people. NUC articulated that "they were the people's voice" and they "were non-partisan defenders of secular democracy".<sup>34</sup> The self-declared legitimacy and the perceived power of the Committee were distributed over the body politic. It may not have been true. It may not have been the actual reality, but the fact that it was articulated as such, and at least some part of the population accepted it as such, made it true. In the end, the PM accepted the court's legitimacy (and he was sentenced to death penalty) at the end of the trials.

Conclusively, the socially constructed and distributed knowledge confined the actions of those involved. The constructed and disseminated knowledge determined their actions to an extent that a reconstitution of knowledge was needed to alter the outcome, change the limitations of the individuals' actions. Correspondingly, a brief inspection of the power relations of those same actors involved with the 1960 coup might be useful to provide a potential insight into this claim.

## **An Overview of the Social Power of the Armed Forces since the 1960s**

The role of the army in Turkish political system perhaps changed after the 1960s coup d'état. The intervention confirmed the social power of the Armed Forces over the society, verifying

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<sup>33</sup> Mehmet Ali Birand, Can Dündar, Bülent Çaplı, *Demirkırat; Bir Demokrasinin Doğuşu*, İstanbul, Milliyet, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

that it would act when needed, to stabilize, or to protect the secular ideals. The involvement of the army in politics was at a different stage after the 60s because their role was almost established. To prove that role, TAF happened to intervene 2 more times in its history, once in 1971 and in 1980.<sup>35</sup> When intervened in 1971, it declared its responsibility, its duty, and took over in “a state of chaos” with the greater public “not surprised” of the action.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, in 1980, the coup occurred in a time of violent upheaval with the Army assuming its “responsibility” yet again. It is further argued the coup of 1960 reinforced the military as the protector of democracy within, defending the stability of reforms initiated by Ataturk, and the encompassing secular ideals.<sup>37</sup> The reinforced, well-known, power of the Armed Forces and the *expectation that it would intervene* lasted until up to today, perhaps, as the political and social climate today indicates a significant power shift in Turkey, advocating a change of the socially distributed knowledge about the Army. Although it is very early to examine the current state of affairs, it seems that the power relations between the government, the Armed Forces, and the larger body politic is changing, but the role of expectation and the impact of knowledge distributed remains the same.

The current ruling party (AKP) with an overwhelming majority within the Government of Turkey is serving its 3<sup>rd</sup> term, advocating pro-Islamic policies and controversial remarks on secularism, to the extent that it faced a total ban from participating

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<sup>35</sup> Turkish Armed Forces also issued a memorandum in 1997 against a pro-Islamic Prime Minister and his Welfare Party, but the event was seen as a “statement to act in accordance” and was not considered an intervention by many and is a matter of debate up to today.

<sup>36</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London: Routledge, 1993.

<sup>37</sup> George Harris, The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics, P.1. *Middle East Journal*, 19 (1), 1965 pp. 54-66.



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in politics from the Constitutional Court.<sup>38</sup> AKP further started a campaign three years ago against the Armed Forces, named “Operation Sledgehammer” detaining some 370 officers and generals, trialing them on charges of an “attempted coup going back to 2003.”<sup>39</sup> The case is on-going and it is therefore not clear how many of the detainees will be charged – or on what counts. Without getting into much speculation, however, a few questions need pointing out. The first is how did the current government achieve this kind of subjugation? How were they this “powerful”? It seems as if they simply started the proceedings, arrested the alleged conspirators, and continue to have them stand trial even today. But didn’t everybody in the government circles know that the Army was actually a very powerful institution? This has never been done before, the Armed Forces never been suppressed. Could it be that the knowledge of the Army as an invincible, influential, and intervening figure was a product of the knowledge distributed? According to the Barnesian approach in power, it only takes for the *constituted knowledge* to take a different form – to be reconstituted, contested or revised – and the self-fulfilling prophecy would fail, which somehow seems rather applicable to the current situation.

The knowledge of the Army being powerful self-validated itself over many years, but once the opposite notion is brought into light (as the Army being not quite influential in politics) it

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<sup>38</sup> The NY Times, “Turkish Court Calls Ruling Party Constitutional”, 31 July 2008. Available at [www.nytimes.com/2008/07/31/world/europe/31turkey.html?fta=y.&\_r=0] See also, The Economist, “The Battle for Turkey’s Soul”, 3 May 2007. Available at [www.economist.com/node/9116747?story\_id=9116747].

<sup>39</sup> The Economist, “Turkey and Its Army: Erdogan and His Generals”, 2 Feb 2013. Available at [www.economist.com/news/europe/21571147-once-all-powerful-turkish-armed-forces-are-cowed-if-not-quite-impotent-erdogan-and-his].

seems equally possible to see another set of outcome. Another question to ask is *why didn't the previous governments attempt the same course of action against the Armed Forces?* Could the previously toppled governments do the same? Could they simply arrest the officers and put them on trials for an attempted coup? It seems quite possibly yes. The knowledge of the Armed Forces being powerful was socially constructed, which created a certain expectation from the actors of whom the Army was in a relationship with. Once the distributed knowledge was fractured, damaged, and changed, and the “newly constituted” knowledge reinstated another “true” notion: the Army is not that powerful. The government did not perceive them as powerful, did not think of them as powerful, and somehow their ideas seem to be vindicated. In fact, the State is in power now, above all. The PM himself, as the head of government is in power. Could this be the true? Indeed, the government seems to be in power – they are, after all, arresting prominent secular academics and arresting more journalists than any other country in the world.<sup>40</sup> Somehow their “power” seems like it remains somewhat unchecked at the moment – just like the power of the military was accepted, unchecked, without a contest 50 years ago. Can it be that the power of the state (exercised over the society) is socially constructed today? Has the state become “powerful” because we perceived, because we accepted them to be? Maybe so. Probably the State’s physical exercise of power through its law enforcement is striking, but it is equally acceptable to see that their “power” is more solidified, accepted, and materialized as the society confirms it.

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<sup>40</sup> Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, “Prominent Turkish Academic Who Advocated Secular Reforms Arrested”, *Science* (337), July 2012. p. 337 and The Guardian, “Turkish Freedom Crisis”, 23 Oct 2012, Available at [[www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2012/oct/23/press-freedom-turkey](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/greenslade/2012/oct/23/press-freedom-turkey)].

## **Concluding Remarks**

All in all, the case of Turkish Armed Forces, its coup of 1960 and the subsequent events provide a curious case for the argument of social construction. There may have been, arguably, many reasons and rationales behind the actions of the actors involved, but socially derived knowledge and the social power it creates nonetheless remains a strong contender. If we are to entertain the idea that social knowledge and power determines individual actions based on the fact that it creates an expectation upon actors, few important points remain to be examined. How exactly do these social knowledge originate? What are the sources of social knowledge? Is it that social power originates itself and the actors are subsequently bound to act based on that? If proven to be an effective tool to determine actions of individuals, can power relations and social power be easily exploited – and if that is the case, can that exploitation be avoided? These questions have been around for discussion and as social constructs change, notions that bound them become flexible and open for further exploration.