

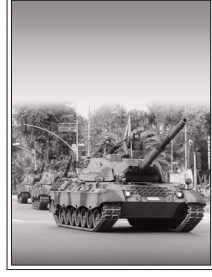
ANALYSIS

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THE ROAD TO JULY 15 IN THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES AND COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS IN ITS AFTERMATH

MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ, MURAT ASLAN





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ABSTRACT

Turkey has experienced, for the first time in the Republic's history, a coup attempt by a religious community, known as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), who secretly flourished in the cadres of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). The significant issue is that the infiltrating body of FETÖ-members were well-known in so far as their presence, but were not well identified in terms of their exact identity and network. The overall discourse of the FETÖ infiltration of the TAF, the July 15 coup attempt, and the imposed measures of the AK Party government challenged the combat effectiveness of the TAF, especially in the realm of the witnessed crises in the Middle East. This paper will scrutinize the challenges and probable courses to steer the TAF out of the current dilemmas, and will offer a perspective on the combat readiness and the transformation of the civil-military relation in the post-July 15 Turkey.



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INTRODUCTION

Turkey has experienced, for the first time in the Republic's history, a coup attempt by a religious community, known as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), who secretly flourished in the cadres of the Turkish Armed Forces. In other words, the coup attempt was not a hierarchically organized and committed undertaking, but an externally controlled attempt based on the mobilization of the brainwashed cells of FETÖ.¹ The significant issue is that the infiltrating body of FETÖ-members were well-known in so far as their presence, but were not well identified in terms of their exact identity and network. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) were partially captured internally by a civilian-military group whose goal was to bring to life the utopic teachings of Fetullah Gülen. The overall discourse of the FETÖ infiltration of the TAF, the July 15 coup attempt, and the imposed measures of the AK Party government challenged the combat effectiveness of the TAF, especially in the realm of the witnessed crises in the Middle East. This paper will scrutinize the challenges and probable courses to steer the TAF out of the current dilemmas, and will offer a perspective on the combat readiness and the transformation of the civil-military relation in the post-July 15 Turkey.

1. "Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü'nün (FETÖ/PYD) 15 Temmuz 2016 Tarihli Darbe Girişimi ile Bu Terör Örgütü'nün Faaliyetlerinin Tüm Yönleriyle Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Önlemlerin Belirlenmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırması Komisyon Raporu", Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, Ocak 2017; "İşte FETÖ ilgili MİT Raporunun Tamamı," *Hürriyet*, 26 Mayıs 2017.

The TAF are experiencing a transition period to augment their combat effectiveness. In this sense, a functional division of the TAF will be examined in regards to the infiltration and practices of FETÖ and the measures taken by the AK Party government after the July 15 military coup attempt. Hence the main questions to be investigated are: To what extent did FETÖ challenge combat effectiveness? How did the imposed measures of the AK Party government affect the combat readiness of the TAF during the last year? For this purpose, four core military functions, namely command and control, personnel, military intelligence, and operations, will be assessed in the context of the transformation of the Turkish military after July 15.

THE CHALLENGE OF FETÖ

The Gülenist project is neither new nor a surprise for Turkey. FETÖ started to infiltrate the Armed Forces at the beginning of the 1980s by finding needy military cadet nominees and preparing them for the admittance examinations. Military high schools were the primary targets of such attempts since TAF leadership had opened a fourth military high school to stop the admittance of graduates of civilian high schools in order to educate a military generation more devoted to republican values. Although the FETÖ movement was not in the foreground but "*Nur Cemaat*",² hundreds of military cadets were dismissed from the Military High Schools and War Colleges since they were consciously educated to qualify for the Military High Schools or the Police College by the private schools and classes of the *Cemaat* run for this purpose. A military cadet, who could hide his FETÖ affiliation, graduated from these schools and assumed active duty in

2. Nur Cemaat is the society devoted to the teachings of Said-i Nursi.

the army, but under the guidance of FETÖ mentors. The wide network of army personnel was under the tight control of FETÖ imams, who shaped the overall structure of the TAF as far as their secret student network occupied crucial positions in the TAF cadres. The FETÖ imams seized the personnel, counterintelligence, and critical staff positions in order to influence the decision-making processes behind a ‘curtain’ as students were not aware of other FETÖ members in the TAF due to a ‘cell’ structure.³ It was a perfect sample of a functionally designed network of which the cells reported to their civilian cell leaders.

FETÖ had examined the traditions of the TAF and perceived its traditions and customs as vulnerabilities. The prominent and privileged ‘staff officer’ system was identified as the core target of FETÖ efforts to capture the command and control of the TAF after the 2000s. Once War Academies were captured, the whole army was in the hands of Gülen’s imams, suppressing the potential commanders and the ‘other’ officers by perpetrated plots. The Ergenekon, Balyoz and espionage trials after 2008⁴ appear to have been the course of an elimination process with the collaboration of FETÖ’s police forces, military personnel and prosecutors/judges to purify the TAF of officers. As a result, the group of soldiers and police officers who initiated the July 15 coup attempt were systematically located in the cadre of the TAF.

3. For more historical works about the evolution of FETÖ within the Turkish Armed Forces see Ahmet Zeki Üçok, *Tek Başına*, (Doğan Kitap, İstanbul: November 2016); Çetin Acar, *FETÖ’nün TSK Yapılanması*, (Truva, İstanbul: May 2017); Yavuz Selim Demirağ, *İmamların Öcü: Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri’nde Cemaat Yapılanması*, (Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, İstanbul: 2015), 11th edition; Mustafa Önsel, *Ağacın Kurdu, TSK’de Şakirtlerin İlgali Mi? Fethullah’ın Askerleri*, (Alibi Yayıncılık, Ankara: August 2016), 28th Edition; Selahattin Günday, “FETÖ TSK’yi Nasıl Ele Geçirdi?,” *Al Jazeera Türk*, 6 March 2017.

4. In order to see a detailed analysis regarding the process of Ergenekon and other military trials in Turkey see *Middle East Critique’s* special issue “The Ergenekon Counter-Terrorism Investigation in Turkey: Representations and Implications,” *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 21, (2012).

The general strategy of FETÖ was to create a check mechanism on the TAF members and direct them in accordance with the agenda of FETÖ, heavily influenced and collaborated by foreign intelligence services. The character of such an intervention was to hamper the required discourses against the policies of TAF leadership, while FETÖ strategists injected their organization’s interests in the TAF. For instance, crucial decisions such as promotions of officers, appointments, and counterterrorism operations were planned and executed to favor FETÖ members and the future network of FETÖ leadership. As a result of the intense control of the system, the TAF was in the hands of FETÖ, as was witnessed in the structures of other state apparatuses. FETÖ’s influence had devastating, subversive and destructive effects on the affairs of the TAF, as will be examined below.

Command and Control

TAF has a very centralized command system, which has been usually subjected to criticism due to the lack of adequate initiative to any start action. Commanders at all levels build a command system to monitor friendly troops, track the changes in the operational environment, and act in accordance with developments. In this frame, the headquarters and the operation center are the main apparatuses that commanders could keep a tight grasp of their subordinates’ actions. Units directly receive orders from commanders; the headquarters and operation centers usually coordinate subordinate commands ‘in the name’ or ‘by the order’ of the commander.⁵ The key staff officer who oversees command and control activities is the Chief of Staff of the military formation, especially by means of the Chief of Operations,

5. These two terms are used to disseminate orders to respectively adjacent or subordinate commands, mostly by the initiative of a Department Chief of Headquarters under the guidance of Chief of Staff.

both of whom are usually graduates of the War Academy. Hence the critical posts in command cadres, headquarters and operation centers are the staff officers who exercise a certain control over other officers, directly shaping the operations and daily routines. In accordance with such customary exercises, distinguished battalions and (air-naval) fleets were usually commanded by War Academy graduates to prepare them for further leadership positions and direct responsibility was given to ‘more educated’ officers in operations planning and execution. A noteworthy number of regiments and equivalent units were commanded by staff officers before their nomination to flagged ranks. In other words, it was vital to command a battalion and regiment in order to be a brigadier. Hence, FETÖ identified the War Academy and staff officer cadres as prioritized positions especially after the 2000s.⁶

FETÖ, in the light of its prominence, conquered the staff officer system that offered vast opportunities to shape the whole of the TAF. The decision makers in the high ranks of the TAF, along with critical posts in the headquarters of the General Staff and subordinate Services (Army, Navy and Air Force), adjusted personnel, operations, logistics and general planning policies in accordance with the priorities of FETÖ, which was also aligned by the policies of their foreign mentors. Staff officers who had qualified at the War Academy in the beginning of the 2000s, on the other hand, lacked adequate skills in commanding troops since skilled officers had been

pushed out of the competition in the admission examinations. As a result, the command system of the TAF was captured by unqualified staff officers in order to consolidate FETÖ’s own power and network.

The command system was vulnerable in two different aspects that were exploited by FETÖ. Initially, commanders, whether they were FETÖ members or not, were in direct contact with staff officers. Hence, they were exposed to the possibility of being informed by these officers of their FETÖ prejudices. FETÖ members would have challenged engagements that occurred by presenting selected information. For example, the mandatory retirement of colonels⁷ with limited compensation was facilitated by the project “Transformation Department” of the General Staff whose chief is allegedly one of the main perpetrators of the coup attempt. The main goal of the Colonel haymaking project was not efficiency, but to have FETÖ members occupy the critical seats at the headquarters by eliminating alternative candidates.

The second aspect of FETÖ’s command embedment was to draft orders especially in electronically signed formats that could facilitate FETÖ members mobilization of units as was witnessed on July 15. The authorization of drafting an order for a hidden purpose would shape the conditions of interjecting FETÖ’s priorities. For instance, the Force Development Department of Land Forces Command, later renamed the Transformation Department, had the opportunity to draft orders “in the name” or “by the order” of a commander without adequately informing him on the exact nature of the order. The chief of this department was also involved in the direct execution of the coup attempt in Istanbul and Akıncı.⁸ Besides, the or-

6. For instance, 89 officers who graduated from the War College in 1994 succeeded in War Academy admittance; 66 of whom were active in the July 15 coup attempt. They were admitted to a military high school in 1986 where most Gülenist officers were accepted as military students; “TSK’ya Adım Adım Sızmışlar! Meğer Planları...,” *Gazete Vatan*, 6 March 2017; Interviewed officers claim that officers of the class 1994 were the most privileged in regards to their admittance to the War Academy and profitable tasks such as the high salaries offered abroad. The other privileged graduation date from the War College for Gülenist officers is 1990 –these officers advanced in the greatest number to Gülenist generals following the 2014 High Military Council’s decisions.

7. Mehmet Tezkan, “İşte FETÖ’nün Siyasi Ayağı,” *Milliyet*, 9 March 2017.

8. “Eski Albay Muzaffer Düzenli: Akıncı’ya İş Yemeği Meselesiyle Çağırdım,” NTV, 8 June 2017.

der of martial law clearly indicates the extent to which FETÖ members made use of the TAF command system. Previously coordinated military units were mobilized across the country with a ‘legitimately’ drafted and released martial order. The command and control system, then, was vulnerable to FETÖ’s illegal and unauthorized incursions. Put another way, the command system lacked the required control mechanisms to prevent the illegal attempts of directing the army.

Eventually the command and control system of the TAF was investigated by FETÖ to such an extent as to capture the whole body of the military. As far as the agenda of FETÖ and its linkage to intelligence services were concerned, the TAF could be (and probably was) hindered in its military commitments. The claim of the involvement of intelligence services remains, however, an allegation as concrete evidence is lacking; yet, the probability of such a capacity is worrisome and requires taking necessary measures. The July 15 coup attempt is a consequence of FETÖ’s destructive capabilities; we do not know the extent of their other undertakings, achieved by occupying key posts in the command structures before July 15, especially when one considers the number of arrested generals.

Finally, the actual damage of the July 15 coup attempt in terms of command and control is the erosion of trust. The members of the subordinate military may start to question every order by the higher echelons after the uprising since prosecutors filed against every officer who complied to the orders. Any situation may be perceived as a coup attempt in the future that a systemic military mechanism need to be built to prevent misunderstandings. It is beyond doubt that combat effectiveness is directly related to the sense of trust and, therefore, an efficient command and control system needs to be put in place.

Personnel Affairs

FETÖ had captured cadres of the personnel departments more effectively than other departments within the TAF.⁹ Personnel departments are units where critical processes such as promotion, appointment, conscription, personnel admission, records and qualifications are planned and implemented. To some extent these departments have certain independence as they attribute their suggestions to digitally run assessment parameters that commanders will not access to check the details. They could present some portion of the parameters to justify their preferences while concealing other ones. Hence, sensitive personnel procedures can be manipulated, directly affecting the combat readiness of the TAF.

The general strategy of FETÖ was to create a check mechanism on the TAF members and direct them in accordance with the agenda of FETÖ, heavily influenced and collaborated by foreign intelligence services.

The initial challenge of FETÖ was to build commissions for interviews to review the admittance applications for the military schools. These commissions were built after the selection process of personnel departments which were under the dominance of FETÖ members to arrange admittance of FETÖ students.¹⁰ Additionally, FETÖ members imposed strict rules to show the ‘impartiality’ and ‘objectivity’ of the commissions by increasing the number of commission members from three to five (with a

9. “FETÖ TSK’yı Nasıl Ele Geçirdi?,” *Yeniçağ*, 29 July 2016.

10. İsmail Hakkı Pekin, “Mülakat Komisyonları FETÖ Militanlarından Oluşuyordu,” *TRT Haber*, 5 August 2016.

voting power of three); having nominees draw lots to determine which commission will conduct the interview; and, finally, adding two staff officers to show the importance of the nomination process. But the majority of the interviewing commissions were identified as FETÖ members, especially the staff officers who discharged all apparent measures.

The appointment strategy was based on occupying critical positions with the appropriate FETÖ members rather than appointing candidates who are loyal to the constitution or hold anti-FETÖ sentiments. FETÖ members, on the other hand, were appointed to promising posts that allowed them to present themselves to high-level commanders while they had control of the daily schedules of their superiors. Positions outside of Turkey, especially military attachés and NATO posts, were offered to FETÖ members so as to profit from the high salary and pay *himmət*¹¹. Personnel records were under the tight control of FETÖ members. Early promotions and the suspension of personnel rights were planned in these sections while the personnel's appeals to courts against subjective decisions were examined by FETÖ's military judges while truly qualified personnel was denied accessing the judicial system.

The dominance of FETÖ in the personnel departments led to the admittance, promotion, appointment and military decoration of unqualified personnel. Officers with limited capacity would command units, profit from privileges and pretend to be skilled officers in the eyes of the higher echelons simply because they were somehow chosen for distinguished positions. The discrimination in favor of FETÖ members had granted the vast capabilities of the TAF to unqualified officers, downgrading the TAF's combat power.

Military Intelligence

Military intelligence can be gathered in two functional tiers. The first is combat intelligence that it is a process of heavy duty with maps, operational planning and briefs. The second is counterintelligence, which focuses on the personnel's reliability in terms of loyalty to the values of the state. Combat intelligence was directed to ordinary intelligence officers with the heavy burden of the daily routines of the headquarters. But counterintelligence officers were selected among FETÖ members by the FETÖ-guided personnel departments to prevent probable filing and hinder the elimination process of FETÖ members while discrediting skilled staff.

The prominent outcome of this strategy was the targeting of personnel and the activities of combat intelligence - despite underlining its vitality - by diverting the main efforts of the counterintelligence of honest officers by accusing them with gambling, depravity, or betrayal as was witnessed in the Ergenekon, Balyoz and espionage trials.

Operational Capability

The operational capability of the TAF was again controlled by the staff officers most of whom were FETÖ members. The questions of whether FETÖ members hindered counterterrorism operations and whether they started any military action against the interests of Turkey are still unclear.

Indicators like the detention of two PKK members in Manisa, hosting 14 FETÖ suspects in their homes,¹² may be offered as proof of the linkage between FETÖ and the PKK and could further prove FETÖ's capacity to downgrade the TAF's operational capabilities. The PKK did not act against the Turkish Security Forces around July 15 in a manner that would indicate a coor-

11. *Himmət* is a certain percentage discharged from the salaries as donation to FETÖ.

12. "FETÖ-PKK İşbirliği Böyle Deşifre Oldu," *Sabah*, 22 February 2017.

dination between the two terrorist organizations as a result of bargaining process at the expense of Turkish national interests.¹³ The linkage of the PKK and the U.S. is also an indicator of the possible linkage of FETÖ and the U.S.

The July 15 military coup attempt was proof that FETÖ members were in charge of distinguished TAF units. The Special Forces, a remarkable number of pilots in the air force and army aviation were heavily populated by FETÖ members.

Furthermore, a considerable amount of marine and naval officers participated in the coup attempt. Twenty-nine naval vessels sailed into the sea at 9 pm on July 15 – this number constitutes 70 percent of Turkish sea power.¹⁴ Naval staff officers who assumed command due to an alleged terror threat called the personnel on duty and cruised into Turkish territorial waters.

Additionally, members of FETÖ mobilized 35 aircrafts, 37 helicopters, 246 tanks and armored personnel carriers during the night of the military coup attempt. The TAF announced the number of overall personnel who participated in the uprising as 8,651; this number includes soldiers who were unaware of the coup attempt or uprising, but were informed about a military exercise or counterterrorism measures.¹⁵ An unknown number of soldiers were later released from custody.

This picture indicates that FETÖ was capable of mobilizing, halting, manipulating the assets and operational capability of the TAF, although it is not clear if FETÖ committed such acts before the coup attempt. In accordance

with the findings regarding staff officers, who plan and activate operational capabilities, it can be argued that FETÖ was aware of the TAF's operational decisions. Probable linkage to the PKK and foreign intelligence services could bring to light the leak of sensitive information on the activities of the TAF that could damage the efforts of the organization and waste Turkey's resources.

FETÖ's Destructive Effect on Combat Readiness

FETÖ's distinct effect on the combat readiness of the TAF was to fill the cadres with unqualified personnel lacking skills to plan and execute military tasks. The positive prejudice of flag officers towards the loyalty, hardship and dignity of staff officers enabled FETÖ to infiltrate the cadres very close to the commanding generals who facilitated the promotion of these officers.

Meanwhile FETÖ obtained the opportunity to control generals while extracting information on the course of events with the help of the assisting personnel. Hence, the TAF was actually under the tight control system of FETÖ which would manipulate its knowledge of TAF's situation, its capabilities, developments, or probable course of engagements. Under the shade of findings on TAF's personnel, intelligence and operations functions, FETÖ decreased TAF's combat readiness.

Betraying the system with the infiltration of FETÖ-affiliated members will never serve the benefits of Turkey or the TAF – it only serves the interests of FETÖ. Consequently, the combat readiness of the TAF after the 2000s was bound to the vital consent of FETÖ, rather than to its actual capabilities. Moreover, July 15 eroded the combat effectiveness of the TAF by breaching the trust and manipulating the psychology of honest soldiers. The AK Party government needs to treat these soldiers fairly, leaving all prejudices aside.

13. Mehmet Tezkan, "Darbeyi PKK Bile Biliyormuş," *Milliyet*, 8 September 2016.

14. Mesut Hasan Benli, "Askeri Gemilerin Yüzde Yetmişi Darbeye Katıldı," *Hürriyet*, 15 January 2017.

15. Most indicted soldiers claim that they were called on duty because there was an exercise or there was a threat by DAESH. This claim needs to be confirmed by the courts after a thorough investigation of the relevant evidence.

THE EFFECTS OF AK PARTY REGULATIONS AFTER THE JULY 15 COUP ATTEMPT

The main target of the reparation period after July 15 was, first, to expel the putschists and the members of FETÖ who have been infiltrating the military since the 1980s. The active supporters of the coup will also be prosecuted; they can be defined as opportunists within the army who have anti-Erdoğan or anti-AK Party sentiments.¹⁶ This lustration policy aims at the total dismissal of FETÖ members from the armed forces. The FETÖ members who infiltrated the TAF did so at different levels (particularly within the cadets) and thus the process of removing them entails a process of arresting them for being members of a terrorist organization. The state of emergency, which was implemented shortly after the military coup attempt, is meant to expedite the lustration period in accordance with the laws and the constitution. On July 16, as a first reaction, the government arrested 2,839 soldiers of various ranks.¹⁷

The most significant dimension of the challenge at hand is the fragile process that the TAF is currently undergoing. Given that the TAF as an institution has been experiencing a turbulent period since the Ergenekon trials, what happened on July 15 made this process even more fragile. It also damaged the credibility of the army in the eyes of society. On the other hand, it is also observed that the TAF is experiencing a significant breakthrough in terms of its institutional social psychology because of the terror created by the attempted military coup. It can only be expected that the TAF will enter a spe-

cific period of rehabilitation in order to restore itself and move forward. In this context, the TAF will need to prioritize regaining the confidence of the people while simultaneously strategizing an in-house reconstruction. Above all, the TAF needs to review its combat readiness and take the necessary measures under the leadership of the Turkish government. The following section will scrutinize the states of command and control, the personnel, military intelligence, and the operation functions following the measures taken after the July 15 uprising to assess the combat effectiveness and determine additional measures that can be taken.

Command and Control

The government started to restructure the TAF and the whole defense of Turkey as soon as the July 15 military coup attempt was defeated in accordance with the principle of civilian supremacy. In this sense, the decrees after July 15 brought devastating changes in the command links and military structure. The Decree No. 668 (Dated July 27, 2017) puts the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Commands under the full authority of the Ministry of Interior, like the police forces, with the exception of the military duties of mobilization and wartime. It was a revolution in terms of weakening military posture. The Decree No. 669 was very comprehensive in terms of subordinating the Services to the Ministry of Defense and revolutionizing its authority by means of personnel policies. In fact, the shift after July 15 was in compliance with the military traditions of Western armies in terms of civilian supremacy and effectiveness. The Ministry of Defense quickly replaced critical high-level positions with 'ranked' civilians while restructuring its headquarters. The transformation efforts of decades were suddenly materialized after July 15, although the TAF still needs further transformation in a revolutionary spirit.

16. Burhanettin Duran, "FETÖ Tasfiyesinde İki Kritik Husus," *Sabah*, 23 July 2016.

17. "Başbakan Yıldırım'dan Açıklama: Kalkışma Bastırıldı, 161 Şehit Var," NTV, 16 July 2016.

The constitutional amendments also challenged the command and control system of the TAF. The amendments, however, do not have direct effect on the transformation or the structure of the TAF; they define the Chief of General Staff as a constitutional authority responsible for the defense of the country against the President. But the decrees after July 15 indicate the Minister of Defense as the Chief of all Services. Hence a 'double headed' leadership can be claimed due to the presence of two Chiefs upon the Services. The General Staff, which is limited by intelligence and operational planning, and the Ministry of Defense with overall responsibility may end up holding countering stances. As a result, strategic level command and control needs to be arranged for further betterment. In this spirit, a centralized headquarters structure and well-integrated force posture need to be considered in the frame of a revolutionary defense reform. The same reform process can be applied to the medium- and low-level military force structures beginning with flexible, wise thinking in military engagements and capacity possession for combat readiness.

Personnel Affairs

In the aftermath of July 15, there have been nine waves of major discharges: July 27, July 30, September 2, September 7, October 29, November 22, January 6, February 7, and April 29. Each of these days brought the dismissal of thousands of officers and non-commissioned officers from the TAF. The Decree no. 667 (Dated July 23, 2017) facilitated the dismissal of personnel affiliated with FETÖ by the Ministry of Defense, while leaving the Gendarmerie and Coast Guard to the authority of the Ministry of Interior. The Decree No. 668 (Dated July 27, 2017) delivered the first list of soldiers to be deported from the cadres of the TAF, including 149 generals, 1,099 officers, and 436 non-commissioned officers.¹⁸

18. The Decree No. 668, (Dated 27 July 2017).

On September 8, for the first time since the discharges began, the official website of the Chief of Staff provided a breakdown on the true numbers of the TAF personnel. According to the figures given, approximately 351,000 personnel serve in the Turkish army, navy and air force: 206 generals; 29,949 officers; 67,476 non-commissioned officers (NCO); 48,879 specialist soldiers; 15,888 contractual soldiers; and 188,611 conscripts. Accordingly, 46% of the TAF are professionals, while 54% are conscripts. When these numbers are compared to March 2016 figures, we see a 38% reduction in the number of generals, who then numbered 325 in all three branches, and an 8% reduction in the numbers of officers who censuses as 32,451. There were no major changes in the other ranks. According to the most recent figures available, more than 7,000 officers of different ranks have been arrested while 6,511 officers have been dismissed from the armed forces as of March 2017.¹⁹

The TAF needs to review its combat readiness and take the necessary measures under the leadership of the Turkish government.

Personnel recruitment and education was another field to imminently be reformed, since FETÖ had dominated these processes. The Ministry of Defense assumed the authority and responsibility of recruitment of all personnel types (students, officers, non-commissioned officers, specialists, clerks, contractors and other employees) by attaching the Personnel Recruitment Department of all Services to the General Personnel

19. "Bakan Işık TSK'dan İhraç Sayısını Açıkladı," En Son Haber, 17 March 2017, <http://www.ensonhaber.com/bakan-isik-tskdan-ihrac-sayisini-acikladi-2017-03-17.html>, (Access date: 7 July 2017).

Directorate of the Ministry of Defense.²⁰ Reliable and retired officers and non-commissioned officers are called on duty and authorized to make interviews in the interview commissions after their security clearances are confirmed by the Intelligence Agency and the Security Forces. The recruitment process has been established on objective parameters based on physical and health proficiency, academic success and reliability. Success in the recruitment process relies on a wide spectrum of criteria and scrutiny, mainly focusing on probable affiliation to terror organizations, criminal acts, morality, dignity, and loyalty. There was a risk for the infiltration of the TAF's cadres by FETÖ in a second attempt after July 15. Despite many difficulties and the intense recruitment process, the Ministry of Defense succeeded in filling the gaps after the dismissal of FETÖ members from the TAF. But the infiltration attempts of other religious communities appeared to be another issue in the recruitment process since these societies were also keen on having their followers be members of the TAF. Hence loyalty to the constitution appears to be a vital prerequisite for personnel recruitment.

Education was the second field of concern after July 15. FETÖ was very attentive in filling the cadres of the military schools and in favoring FETÖ members while humiliating military cadet. Many students were forced to leave school or were dismissed with disciplinary acts. Additionally, all Services were in direct charge of their personnel training and education, while military high schools, vocational schools for non-commissioned officers, and war colleges were under the authority of these Services. The War Academy, on the other hand, was subordinated to the General Staff, comprising the Armed Forces, Land, Air and Naval Academies. As a result, curricula and personnel education policy was dis-

tributed at the initiative of Service commands. The amendments by the Decree No. 669 built a National Defense University to overcome the expansive education system and have a bolder hand on personnel recruitment while shutting down military high schools.²¹

The interviewed officers argued that the idea of a National Defense University was a long-term desire of the officers and that the education curricula of the War College were always in dispute. Once-educated 'system engineers' of the War Colleges could meet the requirements of troop management. According to the claims of retired personnel, these 'system engineers' sought personnel career advancement rather than being devoted to military tasks. Hence a new and progressive curricula would prepare officers and non-commissioned officers to command troops. On the other hand, July 15 exposed another risk. Recruited military students can still be admitted by FETÖ after the military coup attempt for the further terror colonization of the TAF. For this reason, the AK Party government removed all existing cadets from military education institutions and offered them admittance to civilian schools pending their academic success.

Military high schools were also a sensitive issue since the 1980s. The question of whether the closure of military high schools would prove a challenge to the combat effectiveness of the TAF is not a disputed issue. Military high schools are good for having devoted military generations, but are not a prerequisite for having warriors.²² Contrary to general belief, the interviewed officers argued, that a comprehensive occupational training program in War Colleges and Vocational Non-Commissioned Schools is adequate to raise a warrior generation; this was conveyed despite their romanticism in favor of military high schools.

20. Personnel recruitment was under the authority of the Services before the July 15 coup attempt. Article 37 of the Decree No. 668 passed the authority to the Ministry of Defense.

21. The Decree No. 669, (Dated July 31, 2017).

22. Merve Seren, "Askeri Liseler Tartışması," *Al Jazeera*, 16 August, 2016.

What presents a challenge is not the transformation of the military education system, but filling the numeric gap of the dismissed cadres. The positions that require qualified education and training cannot spontaneously be replenished. If the dismissal of all War College cadets is concerned, at least four years of education need to pass in order to replace the eliminated officers. Besides the graduates after July 15 will be junior officers - senior positions will not be filled. If Turkey does not face a security challenge, the current numbers of military personnel can address its needs. But it is highly probable that Turkey will face serious threats of both a conventional and unconventional nature, and personnel recruitment and training deficiencies will downgrade the combat effectiveness of the TAF. A course to respond to such a challenge would be to shorten the training processes with optimum timings and calling back the retired, reliable and skilled officers whom the Turkish government can easily employ in the short term.

Apart from education, the Ministry of Defense is authorized to have the final word on promotions and appointments other than in the Services. The ranks of flag officers are a matter of strategic preference, but the issue is to select the most skilled officers with merits. The interviewed retired officers have doubts about the qualification process of flag officers who were recruited before July 15. The danger is that the July 15 psychology may push the government to favor officers with known associations to certain ideological and religious societies. The profile of an ideal officer for flag officer positions must rid itself of loyalty and gratitude to outsider societies. Hence the promotion system, which has been handed over to the Ministry of Defense, needs to be fairer, more transparent and merit-based since generals will possess power which will only increase as they get promoted.

Appointment, on the other hand, is an issue that affects families and the morale of every sol-

dier. The Ministry of Defense has the approval authority of appointments in so far as all Services are subordinated to the Ministry by Article 35 of The Decree No. 669. Democratic norms impose such a practice: civilian supremacy needs to be based on a check mechanism regarding appointments. But in the post-July 15 period, as expected, it could be a thorny issue to find appropriate officers for the relevant posts – it should be pointed out, however, that this transition period is about to end. The coming years will be smoother as combat efficiency can be supported by individually appointing a soldier to the position that s/he fits. On the other hand, the timing and methodology of the appointments should be reviewed by additional arrangements. The appointments are usually prepared in winter and announced in April or May. Personnel move to their new position in June and July. School terms and appointments of spouses regulate these schedules. Similarly, the promotions of flag officers are decided at the beginning of August. The summer period is very intense in terms of personnel mobility and unfortunately counterterrorism operations as well. Appointments and promotions do not have to be at one time and in summer. The winter season, especially during school semester breaks, may be an option for families not to suffer from new appointments. Combat effectiveness has no time restrictions; a continuous process of appointments and promotions should depend on the variable of continuous combat effectiveness. The post-July 15 arrangements need to be furthered by pragmatic and reliable regulative touches in these fields.

Military Intelligence

Military intelligence, which was designed to assist the decision makers of military planning, has long been an ignored function in the TAF. Modern armies have efficient military intelligence capabilities including headquarter branches and data collection assets. The TAF, parallel to the

structural transformation of most armies, built a military intelligence branch. FETÖ, as was discussed in the first section of this paper, occupied the counterintelligence posts in order to have an upper hand on the elimination of officers opposing the presence of FETÖ members. Combat intelligence, on the other hand, was not a field of interest for FETÖ since the collection capability of the TAF was not at the desired level. The National Intelligence Agency, which assumed signals intelligence, appears to be the main information provider in accordance with Act 2937; however, it does not offer support on any tactical and operational level. The post-July 15 arrangements did not bring any change to the nature of military intelligence except in terms of a new undertaking to review personnel reliability.

The main function of the TAF, which is combat readiness and combat against all types of threats, needs to be developed in accordance with democratic norms.

The Ministry of Defense had no intelligence capability in place to monitor the reliability of its personnel before July 15; the Minister announced his intention to build a personnel intelligence branch of what was not a term in counter-intelligence standards worldwide. The actual need was to coordinate the information gaps in the investigations on the reliability of personnel with Security Forces and the Intelligence Agency. The Minister's quest is legitimate since the Ministry of Defense covered the Services in addition to the Ministry's headquarters, Defense Institutions, the Conscription Department and other affiliated institutions. Hence, counterintelligence has become an urgent need for the Ministry. But the issue is that counterintelli-

gence organization is reliant on the need of coordinating and integrating all of TAF's counterintelligence organizations. Besides a ministry responsible for all Services and the defense of the whole country requires a more comprehensive military intelligence institutionalization and one that is operational, capable and deployable. On the other hand, the establishment of such an organization in the Ministry can be controversial since the same capability exists in the General Staff and the Services. As a result, a new approach has become urgent for military intelligence after July 15. Combat effectiveness dictates such a capability and a reform-type undertaking must be initiated for an efficient military intelligence.

Operational Capability

The operational capability of the TAF has not diminished after July 15, but was strengthened by eliminating the putschists. There is a consensus that Turkey's military capacity, in terms of man power, officers, and its deterrence capacity against threats from the PKK and DAESH was not affected by the lustration period. Turkey's ongoing conflict with the PKK and Operation Euphrates Shield (OES) are examples of how Turkey's military was able to react against threats. Many in Turkey, including the military itself, also believe that the OES should be seen as an opportunity to raise motivation and moral within the military in the aftermath of the bloody coup attempt.

Despite promising success in countering terrorism and the OES, the elimination and dismissal of FETÖ members seems to be a challenge in certain military functions, like the Special Forces, Air Force pilots and army aviation, in the short term. Measures to erase such vulnerabilities can be taken by additional regulations. For instance, a mobilization system can be built up to benefit from retired officers and civilians in their fields of expertise. Private companies can be en-

couraged to serve the military in a competitive manner. Personnel policy can be reviewed to replace appropriate military cadres with civilian personnel while military personnel can be diverted for combat and combat support tasks. The TAF needs time to build up capacity in qualified personnel training and in order to reach the point that these personnel are operational.

Combat Efficiency after July 15

The July 15 uprising was a trauma not only for Turkey's democracy, but also for the TAF. The measures taken afterwards were necessary steps to establish civilian supremacy over the TAF. But the main function of the TAF, which is combat readiness and combat against all types of threats, needs to be developed in accordance with democratic norms. The transition period, naturally, has been experienced with difficulties especially in terms of command and personnel functions. But the issues are being overcome in the short term.

Command and control capability need to be rearranged due to the contradictions between the decrees and the constitutional amendments, while the betterment of headquarter structure is a prerequisite. Personnel policy needs to be based on merit and success alongside devotion to the values of Turkish Republic and the constitution. Any additional incursions from actors other than the Turkish government need to be suppressed and stripped of any value. The TAF's operation capability has been breached in certain aspects such as the downsizing of qualified personnel, but this can be overcome by additional measures. Military intelligence, on the other hand, needs to be restructured for an efficient Armed Forces. The elimination of FETÖ members did not downgrade the TAF's combat effectiveness since a single member of FETÖ's can sabotage the overall effort of the TAF. A small but devoted personnel number is an advantage in comparison to high numbers, mixed with betraying cells.

CONCLUSION: STEPPING FORWARD FOR COMBAT READINESS AND EFFECTIVENESS

There was a consensus on the need for the transformation of the Turkish military long before the July 15 military coup attempt. The post-July 15 term offers opportunities to realize such a reformation of the TAF. The reformation is as urgent as the elimination process of FETÖ members. Turkey is at the stage of engaging imminent threats alongside PKK-DAESH terrorism and hence there is no room for delaying a reform. In this sense, the government needs to start a process of augmenting the TAF while displaying its trust in it. Augmentation may start from armament procurement, organizational transformation or capacity building.

Meanwhile the morale and motivation of the TAF are as important as these material transformations. The trust of the Turkish public and government appears to be the top priority of the military personnel. There are arguments claiming that 90 percent of the military are FETÖ members – these claims have no evidence or basis. Such claims can diminish combat effectiveness in the short run. The current personnel of the TAF were loyal to the constitution and did not participate in the uprising. To the contrary, the current cadre resisted the undertaking and some found themselves trapped by the FETÖ conspiracy. Interviewed soldiers of currently retired were mostly influenced by the negative atmosphere against the military in the country and claimed that otherwise they would have continued to serve. The psychology of the military appears to be the most decisive issue for combat effectiveness.

Consequently, combat effectiveness has minor challenges but has not been majorly affected while responding to the current threats. Further measures should be taken via comprehensive planning and implementation with the aim of a better defense system.

Turkey has experienced, for the first time in the Republic's history, a coup attempt by a religious community, known as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETÖ), who secretly flourished in the cadres of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). The significant issue is that the infiltrating body of FETÖ-members were well-known in so far as their presence, but were not well identified in terms of their exact identity and network. The overall discourse of the FETÖ infiltration of the TAF, the July 15 coup attempt, and the imposed measures of the AK Party government challenged the combat effectiveness of the TAF, especially in the realm of the witnessed crises in the Middle East. This paper will scrutinize the challenges and probable courses to steer the TAF out of the current dilemmas, and will offer a perspective on the combat readiness and the transformation of the civil-military relation in the post-July 15 Turkey.



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