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# Crossing Identities and the Turkish Military

Revolutionists, Guardians and Depoliticals:  
A comparative historical analysis  
on Turkish military culture and civil-military relations



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# Chapter 1: Definition of Military Culture

## 1.1 Introduction

Institutional cultures can comprise various ethical rules which give the relevant organisation a distinct character. That rooted character leads the organisation to adopt a consistent behaviour toward outside stimulants. Hence, the outside observer can more or less determine the institution's next step by taking into account its culture. These ethical rules are generally shaped around the institution's foundation purpose, and the experiences it has gained. All institutions – among them big companies, civil institutions, state foundations, and sports clubs – have certain ethical rules. These rules can be written or unwritten. Hence, the military, being the main institution for national security, cannot be excluded from this general rule.

Indeed, militaries tend to have very strong values, beliefs, norms, and ideals which are rooted deeply due to the experiences that they have had for many centuries. Additionally, militaries are very different to other institutions, because their members should be ready to die for the national interests, if necessary. To send somebody to die necessarily requires a highly strict, disciplined, and different education. Thus, military cultures are extensively enveloped with the ideas of altruism, collectivism, self-sacrifice, patriotism, and masculinity. Mostly, the ideas, beliefs, values, symbols, and rituals in the barracks are constructed to convince soldiers that “dying is more honourable than living under specific circumstances”. Hence, one can likely observe major incompatibilities between democratic values and military cultures.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, in a democratic regime, the military should be subordinated to the civilians, because militaries have coercive powers, and they have the potential to use this power against the elected civil authorities. Therefore, political scientists have developed theories to find the best solution for preventing officers from interrupting the natural progress of democracy. Among the relevant studies, Samuel Huntington's milestone *The Soldier and the State* (1957) has a distinguished place. His definition of professional officership and his theory of objective control became inspirational for the works that followed. Huntington argues that the best way of separating civilian and military domains is to professionalise officers. Staying within its own area, the military adopts a professional ethic and remains politically neutral. The increasing professionalism of officers also strengthens the military's combat power.

As a result, this chapter has three targeted contributions which are related to the issues that have been mentioned above. Firstly, it will define the theoretical backgrounds of

1     Huntington (1957): p. 309.

the military culture variable, under the guidance of relevant scholarly debate. Additionally, the main martial ethoi that shapes military cultures will be elaborated. Secondly, the chapter will discuss Huntington's theory of professional officership and objective civilian control. In this way, the aim is to discuss how Huntington's ideas can be connected to the military culture concept in order to maintain military subordination. Lastly, the chapter will compare Huntington's theories with those of the other critical scholars. By doing this, the chapter will explain why Huntington's definition of professionalism is used in this book, what its strengths and weaknesses are, and what this book aims to contribute to Huntington's theory. To implement these contributions, the first part of the chapter looks at the definition and main ethoi of military culture. Then, the chapter will define the professional ethos in military culture, by taking into account Samuel Huntington's opinions. Thirdly, the chapter will compare Huntington's theories with those of the other Civil-Military Relations (CMR) scholars. Lastly, a final evaluation will be carried out by recalling the main ideas and contributions that derive from this chapter.

### 1.2 Definition of Military Culture

Before giving a definition of military culture, it may be helpful to explain what culture is as a sociological term. Culture is defined as rooted values, ideas, norms, ethics, traditions, and beliefs that, over time, have created a worldview for a group or organisation and have led them into action.<sup>2</sup> Culture may comprise "unwritten but largely accepted rules" and create a typical lifestyle for the members of that organisation, which transfers from one generation to the next.<sup>3</sup> Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another".<sup>4</sup> Culture is a learned process, it is not inherited. It originates from environmental factors, not from biological ones such as genes.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, if one makes a comprehensive definition, military culture is a combination of rooted norms, values, ideas, beliefs, and ideals that give officers a general worldview and shape their behaviours toward outside stimulants. Military cultures tend to be affected by civil, political,

2 Christopher Dandeker James Gow, 'Military Culture and Strategic Peacekeeping'. In: *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, London: Department of War Studies, King's College, 2007, p. 59. Also, see: Dale R. Herspring, 'Creating Shared Responsibility through Respect for Military Culture: The Russian and American Cases', *Public Administration Review* 71, No. 4, July 2011: p. 521. Quoted from: Edgar Schein, 'Organizational Culture and Leadership', 2004: p. 226; Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, Zed Books, 2002, p. 20; Don M. Snider, 'An Uninformed Debate on Military Culture', *Orbis*, 43, No. 1, 1999: pp. 13–14.

3 Victoria Langston, Matthew Gould, and Neil Greenberg, 'Culture: What is its Effect on Stress in the Military', *Mil Med*, 172, No. 9, 2007: p. 932.

4 Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill Education, 1991, p. 5.

5 Ibid.

and strategic cultures.<sup>6</sup> In other words, customs, traditions, religious values, vulnerability of geographical position, historical experiences, and dominant ideologies of political cultures may all be determinative.<sup>7</sup>

Military culture can also be referred to by similar terms such as “organisational culture”, “military tradition”, “military ethic”, “military ethos/ethoi”, “military honour”, “military style”, “army culture”, “military doctrine”, and similar.<sup>8</sup> Yet, “military culture” gives arguably a more comprehensive connotation, combining all of the relevant concepts such as “ethic”, “tradition”, “ethos”, and more within. In other words, the term can be associated with any kind of activity that has a military involved. In all types of organisations, whether civil or military, the members may gain stable characteristic behaviours distinct from the rest of society, because they have been living in the same environment for long time.<sup>9</sup> However, within military organisations, these differences tend to be stronger than in civil ones, because their members do not only work in the military bases, but they also live there with their families.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, they are trained in specific schools and academies, and dress in the same uniforms. As Samuel Huntington noted:

6 Feaver (1999): p. 233.

7 All of these factors can be important in the emergence of military culture. Samuel Finer (1962) explains military involvement in politics with the level of a nation’s political culture. Additionally, Colin S. Gray (2007) defines ‘strategic cultures’ of nations as a combination of military/organisational cultures, public cultures, and historical and geographical variables. Therefore, all these political, cultural, and strategic values can be evaluated as intertwined and co-dependent. Colin Gray implies that national disasters such as wars may be triggering the change in cultures. Religious factors can also be explanatory in understanding military cultures, because some armies glorify war due to the ‘martyrship’ concept. For instance, both the Ottoman and Turkish armies are culturally affected by Sunni Muslim beliefs. For these reasons, there have been strong criticisms against the Turkish army claiming that non-Muslims and Alevis are not allowed to enter the military, and they are faced with discrimination during their compulsory military service. Additionally, Islamic references can be seen in the military trainings and campaigns that glorify martyrship. Related to this, Atatürk often applied religious symbols during the Liberation War to increase the military’s motivation. Similar examples were also seen during the Korean War (1950) and the Cyprus War (1974). For a detailed analysis on the case see: Chapter 3. Also see: Schein’s definition quoted in Don M. Snider (1999): p. 14.

8 For instance: Morris Janowitz uses the term ‘the code of professional military honour’ to identify the martial ethoi that specifies how an officer ought to behave. See: Janowitz, *Professional Soldier*, Free Press Paperback, 1960: p. 215. According to Janowitz, the code of professional military honour requires the officer to be above politics and committed to the status quo. Also, the officers cannot be members of political parties and they cannot explicitly show partisanship (ibid.: pp. 233–234, 374). Anthony King, ‘Toward a European Military Culture?’ *Defence Studies*, 6, No. 3, September 2006: p. 259. For instance, Dandeker, et al. (2007) make a comparison between the Swedish and American militaries, regarding their reaction to peacekeeping operations, by taking into account their military cultures. See: Dandeker, et al. (2007): p. 64.

9 Salih Akyurek, Serap Koydemir, Esra Atalay, Adnan Bicaksiz, *Civil-Military Relations and the Distance of Military and Society*, Center of Strategic Researches, Ankara: Bilgesam Press, 2014, p. 16.

10 Janowitz (1960): pp. 175, 178, 220–221.