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## **The State of Emergency Rule (OHAL) and the Turkish Military: How Will It Affect the Military's Combat Prowess?**

*Olağanüstü Hal Kararları ve Türk Ordusu: Ordu'nun Savaş Kapasitesi Nasıl Etkilenecek?*

Hakkı Göker Önen\*

**Abstract:** Turkish civil–military relations (CMR) have fluctuated significantly during Adalet ve Kalkınma (Justice and Development) Party (AK Party) rule. In their first term (2002–2007), the AK Party successfully implemented a reform package to subordinate the military to civilians in line with the European Union progress reports. Nevertheless, starting in their second term, extraordinary events again led the authorities to reconsider Turkey's long-standing legacy of military politicisation. First, a website memorandum, which was carried out by the military authorities, led to the emergence of strict public protests; second, in the so-called Ergenekon investigations, some generals were accused of trying to oust the government; and lastly, the Fetullah Gülen organisation, which penetrated the military, attempted a coup d'état. All these recent developments caused CMR experts to reconsider the CMR in Turkey. As a result of those events, the institutional formation of Turkish CMR was completely changed via the declaration of state of emergency rules (Olağanüstü Hal [OHAL] rules). As such, the research question of this paper addresses the future of the Turkish army's combat efficiency by taking into account the aforementioned changes. By considering the relevant literature and interviews conducted for this purpose, I aim to provide a coherent answer to this question. First, the article will discuss what kinds of event CMR have undergone during the AK Party era. Second, after analysing the Ergenekon investigations and 15 July coup attempt, the article will consider the OHAL rules. Each decision will be analysed from a different perspective to discuss how they are affecting the military's combat prowess.

**Structured Abstract: Introduction:** In their first term (2002–2007), the AK Party implemented several reforms to eliminate the military's long-term dominance over politics. Indeed, these earlier changes were considered important by many authorities for democratisation. Nevertheless, the subsequent process – especially following the declaration of Olağanüstü Hal (OHAL, i.e. state of emergency rule) – has created an incoherent relationship between democratisation and civilianisation (Gürcan & Giscion, 2016). Therefore, the increasing civilian control exceeded the democratic limits through the complete denial of the military's autonomous area depicted by Huntington (1957). Furthermore, the president's increased executive powers after the transition to the presidential system in June 2018 accelerated this process. Due to the KHK (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname) (decree law) no. 703 of OHAL rule, which removed the Yüksek Askeri Şura (YAŞ, Supreme Military Institution) and MGK (National Security Council), the president's control over the Armed

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Forces has increased. The duties of the Chief of General Staff were rescinded and subordinated to the Ministry of National Defense.

**Method:** The research question of this paper addresses the future of the Turkish army's combat efficiency by taking into account the latest changes in civil–military relations (CMR). The tangible data, in this regard, is the OHAL decisions. By considering my interviews and relevant literature, I will discuss potential consequences for the military's combat prowess. Moreover, we present empirical evidence to support the main arguments, the most important being the recent Operation Fırat Kalkanı (Operation Fırat Shield) and Operation Zeytinadağı (Operation Olive Branch) on the south-eastern borders of Turkey. Lastly, the Gülenist penetration of the army and the 15 July 2016 attempted coup also present several indicators regarding politicisation and combat force. Hence, this requires us to consider background events that led to OHAL. As such, I will begin our analysis with a brief summary of pre-OHAL events. At this point, it is necessary to state that most of these interviews and the collection of data for this article include the process beginning with the first OHAL amendment in 2016 to the KHK 703 on 9 July 2018. However, to ensure that this article remains relevant, I also mention the new decisions made by the KHK 703 by considering their possible outcomes. Indeed, the general structure of CMR continues to exist. In other words, the only recent amendments to the KHK 793 have been the removal of YAŞ and the subordination of the Chief of General Staff to the Ministry of Defense. As a result, the main arguments of the article have not been changed after the KHK 703; even the president's remaining control over the military further increased.

**Discussion and Findings:** As aforementioned, the earlier AK Party years (2002–2007) seemed relatively unproblematic as they pertained to CMR. Even the AK Party reforms for restricting military influence were welcomed by the authorities for the sake of democratisation. However, the subsequent process damaged this optimistic scheme because the civilianisation of the regime did not occur hand in hand with the democratisation ideal. Many agree that the milestone of this downfall was the Ergenekon trials (2007–2011), which led to the arrest of a number of active and retired senior officers who allegedly intended to overthrow the AK Party government. During the process, hundreds of active and retired military personnel were detained, and over 250 of them were arrested. More than fifty of the arrested personnel were senior generals, including Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ, Chief Commander of the First Army Hürşit Tolon, Chief Commander of the Naval Forces Özden Örnek, and former Secretary of the National Security Council General Şükrü Sarıışık.

In addition, many important figures in the military who were active or retired and who rose to leading commanding positions in the Air, Land, Navy, and Gendarmerie Forces remained in charge. As a result, the process created a major and sudden change (perhaps in an unprecedented way) in the commanding elite. However, the following developments, especially the 15 July attempted coup, illustrate that the whole process could have been a plot designed by the illegal Fetullah Gülen organisation to infiltrate its own sympathisers because in a couple years, the charged individuals were acquitted from the cases and found innocent. Yet, their positions had already been filled by those of inferior rank, some of whom were secret disciples of Gülenist organisation. The promotions and replacements had a significant negative effect on the discipline, the obey–command structure, and professional ethos of the military. The result was the illegal coup attempt by the Gülenist members of army, which developed in defiance of the obey–command structure. Indeed, the previous tolerance of the Gülenist organisation on behalf of the AK Party – because of the former's Islamist background – proved that rising political influence across the military could lead to fatal results, including poor combat performance. Hence, in the present paper, I will elaborate on this point by considering the incidents during the attempted coup.

**Keywords:** Political Science, Civil–Military, OHAL, Combat Efficiency, AK Party

**Öz:** Türkiye'de sivil-asker ilişkileri AK Parti iktidarı süresince oldukça değişken bir seyir izlemiştir. İlk döneminde (2002-2007), AK Parti başarılı bir biçimde ordu üzerinde sivil denetimi güçlendirecek bir reform uygulamasını başlatmış ve Avrupa Birliği ilerleme raporlarını da dikkate alarak bu bağlamda önemli bir yol kat etmiştir. Fakat ikinci dönemlerinde art arda gelen bir dizi önemli olaylar tekrar Türkiye'de askeri vesayetin durumunu sorgulanır hale getirmiştir. İlk olarak 2007 yılında internet üzerinden verilen bir muhtıra ve ardından gelişen olaylar, sonrasında Ergenekon adı verilen bir soruşturma kapsamında bir grup generalin, hükümeti devirecekleri iddiasıyla suçlanması ve son olarak da ordu içerisine sızan Fetullah Gülen örgütünün başarısız bir darbeye kalkışması gibi olaylar sivil-asker alanında yapılan araştırmaların tekrar ivme kazanmasına sebep olmuştur. Zira bu gelişmeler sonucu Türk sivil-asker ilişkilerinin genel şablonunu tümüyle değiştirecek olan

Olağanüstü Hal Kararları (OHAL) alınmıştır. Bu noktada, bu çalışmanın odaklandığı temel soru OHAL ile gelen değişikliklerin ordunun savaş gücünü gelecekte nasıl etkileyeceği meselesidir. Bu noktada hem ilgili kaynakları inceleyerek hem de bu amaçla yapılan röportajları dikkate alarak bu soruya uygun bir yanıt vermeye çalışılacaktır. İlk olarak AK Parti döneminde sivil-asker ilişkilerinin ne gibi bir seyir izlediği incelenecektir. Bu bağlamda Ergenekon soruşturmaları ve 15 Temmuz darbe girişimi de incelendikten sonra OHAL kararlarına geçilecektir. Kararların her biri farklı başlıklar altında incelenerek ordunun savaş gücünün nasıl etkileneceği tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Siyaset Bilimi, Sivil-Asker İlişkileri, OHAL, Savaş Kapasitesi, AK Parti,

## 1. Introduction

On 15 July 2016, some parts of the military attempted a coup d'état to overthrow the government. It is certain that the Gülenists played a leading role in this attempt (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2017). The illegal organisation had previously been known as an Islamic brotherhood (*cemaat*), which allegedly aimed to penetrate the state departments – especially the Armed Forces – to replace secular democracy with an Islamic sharia rule (Coate & Thiel, 2010: 131–153; Sandal, 2012: 75). Particularly during the Ergenekon era, the members of this organisation were rapidly promoted to higher ranks to fill the empty positions left by Ergenekon suspects (Gürcan, 2018: 3). After the members of this organisation captured key positions in the army, they started the uprising in a non-hierarchical manner. When they began the attempt, the majority of the commanding elite was not aware of the uprising. Hence, the non-Gülenist part of military did not obey the orders of the Gülenist officers. Some of them actively resisted.

According to the confessions of arrested juntaists, there was no obey–command structure between the inferiors and superiors because the hierarchy was shaped according to their position in the Gülenist brotherhood (Başbuğ, 2016). For instance, a major could give an order to a colonel because of his superior rank in the *takwa* (which indicates religious superiority in Islam) (Öztürk & Şendil, Sabah, 21.07.2016). As a result, the whole military and state came very close to a civil war. However, if this army had entered into a war within this framework, the results could have been fatal. There are examples of this in Turkish history. During the Balkan Wars, the army was highly politicised, and sometimes the inferiors objected the orders of superiors (Başbuğ, Sözcü, 10.01.2018). The result was a fatal defeat because of this non-disciplinary and non-hierarchical structure. At this point, if one considers the AK Party's somewhat moderate behaviours toward the Gülenist organisation in the very early stage of their rule, one may easily see the dangers of using politicisation for combat prowess. As will be discussed in the next section, the OHAL amendments could trigger a similar development in the future unless politicians are careful.

## 2.OHAL Regulations

OHAL refers to the state of emergency rule issued by President Tayyip Erdoğan and the AK Party government to remove the Gülenist influence over the state. Normally, this implementation would be considered a democratic requirement in the wake of an attempted coup. Nevertheless, this extraordinary process should be maintained by creating essential democratic (civilian and martial) control mechanisms to prevent possible civilian abuse. This could occur due to the increased executive powers of the president after the 30 June 2018 elections combined with the remaining OHAL amendments that enabled him to issue KHK decree laws, which became regulations without being questioned Parliament.

The new structure seemingly carries potential risks against democratic military autonomy within 'purely military matters' as well as the military's combat effectiveness. As a methodological approach, I will apply the comments of relevant experts, which are taken from our interviews, as well as the relevant literature. For instance, A. Yavuz, a retired general, depicts a highly negative scenario

for the OHAL decisions: ‘The biggest loser of the attempted coup is Fetullah Gülen, the second one is the Turkish Armed Forces. Because, arguably to prevent future coup attempts, the government took some decisions (OHAL) which decrease the military’s combat efficiency’. (A. Yavuz, personal communication, 2017).

Similar to the abovementioned statement, retired senior officers and CMR experts Bingöl and Varlık (2017: 1) express the following:

The OHAL amendments cause the emergence of new problems by making Turkey vulnerable to security threats... The OHAL creates a new scheme which can easily be abused by enemies... In this scheme, Democratic civil control of Armed Forces and combat efficiency may drift into a deadlock.

The abovementioned quotations might seem speculative at first glance. However, if I go into more technical detail by applying to the views of authorised individuals, the concerns of these experts can be understood. As argued by Keyman and Gürçan (2017: 6), a leading Turkish studies expert and a leading Turkish CMR scholar and retired officer, respectively, a ‘half-baked’ reformation process in this regard (OHAL) may undermine the ‘professional ethos’ of military culture by eroding ‘discipline’ (sense of unity, devotion, responsibility, and common interests), ‘cohesion’, and ‘esprit de corps’(shared values among officers). Indeed, there is a positive relationship between a more democratic or balanced CMR and operational effectiveness. Hence, any excessive civilianisation effort against military autonomy does not only weaken democracy but also erodes the military’s ability to accomplish duties given by civilian elites (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018; S. Ertürk, personal communication, 15 May, 2018; M. Gürçan, personal communication, 2018; H. Solmaztürk, personal communication, 6 May, 2018).

Indeed, former Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ identifies three principles for effective combat power: eligibility for appointments, effective combat education, and high levels of moral and motivation. Başbuğ (2017) argues that these are required for a powerful army (the motto of the Turkish army is *Güçlü Ordu Güçlü Türkiye*, ‘Powerful Military Powerful Turkey’) However, the new amendments are arguably not designed for prioritising these vital needs but are predominantly concerned with the promotion eligibility (Başbuğ, 2017).

To discuss Başbuğ’s assumptions, I will analyse each amendment from a different perspective. By considering my interviews, I will argue that there are complicated thoughts about the possible outcomes of OHAL reforms. Hence, I do not assert that the interviewees share common ideas. They welcome changes as they pertain to certain matters and object those regarding other matters. For instance, some interviewees are of the opinion that the changes could be beneficial in the long term, but they have been decided in a hasty manner. The impatient behaviour during the implementation of these reforms, especially regarding the application of the American system in the Turkish army, may have unexpected results on the military’s combat effectiveness (A. Önen, personal communication, 2018). In addition, the absence of strong checks-and-balances mechanisms in this system may cause a rapid politicisation by allocating all the power to one person and those who are aligned with them. Regarding KHK 696 and 703, President Erdoğan has been the only individual to plan, supply, and execute these defence requirements. Again, in the long term, this could cause severe risks regarding operations and equipment collection (A. Mevlütoğlu, personal communication, 11 July, 2018).

Indeed, recent history has proven that a civilian authority that comes to power through democratic methods can later attempt to increase their dominance by intervening in military promotions. A representative example of this is the increasing Nazi influence in the German army before the Second World War. Most of the professional officers were illegally dismissed from commanding positions by way of plots, slander, and coercion. As a result, the German military doctrine was completely renewed by the Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), whose

ambitious ideals eventually prompted Germany and the rest of the world to enter a major war (Huntington, 1957). To prevent such incidents, the general staff should preserve its professional (militarist) and impartial status. On the other hand, the new regulations by the OHAL do not effectively offer such type of control mechanisms and make the military vulnerable to any type of civilianisation threat (e.g. politicisation, factioning, deprofessionalisation, and decreasing combat efficiency.) To elaborate on this vulnerability, in the next sections, I will analyse the new regulations specifically related to distinct aspects: military promotions, education, and training and health services.

### 3. Military Promotions

The duties of the Supreme Military Committee YAŞ – the primary decision-making body regarding senior promotions, including the head commanders of Land, Navy, and Air Forces – was abolished by KHK 703. Most of its functions were connected directly to the president. With the new regulations, the president had overwhelming control over the senior military promotions. He could accelerate or decelerate the promotions of generals and senior officers without regard for the official waiting process. In the previous system, the YAŞ was working as a disciplinary body to eliminate the commanders with potential political interests, especially regarding political Islam (*irticai faaliyet*), including the Gülenists. The duties of the Chief of General Staff were rescinded, and this position was directly subordinated to the Ministry of National Defense. Indeed, until the latest KHK 703 decision, the Chief of General Staff reported to the president and the Head Command of the Land, Navy, and Air Forces, who in turn reported to the Ministry of Defense. However, this framework was found to be risky, especially after the lack of coordination in the Fırat Kalkanı Operation. Hence, all of the abovementioned positions were finally subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, which is normally positive for democratisation if the ministry does not act according to its political concerns (Y. Çillilier, personal communication, 19 July, 2018; N. Özçelik, personal communication, 19 July, 2018).

Additionally, the military courts that were closed during OHAL were previously making final decisions about the removal of personnel who acted against the military's Internal Service Act. Hence, these two bodies (YAŞ and the military courts) played a significant role in the preservation of the military's own professional standards. They were also protecting the military from political and non-hierarchical establishments. According to professional military tradition, for effective combat prowess, promotions within the military need to be made according to individuals' professional accreditations rather than political concerns, worldviews, lifestyles, or other civilian-based factors. However, the new system offers a different framework by which the president is leading figure who makes decisions regarding appointments and promotions.

Under these conditions, the eligibility of generals should be the only criteria. Otherwise, if political interests somehow become a factor in the appointment process, any level of politicisation would threaten the professional ethos of the military and make the military vulnerable to poor combat performance. As aforementioned, one supportive example of this argument is seen in the attempted coup. As a result of the increasing Gülenist influence on military appointments – due to the government's reckless behaviour – several Gülenist officers were rapidly promoted to higher ranks to replace the Ergenekon suspects (Yavuz, 2017: 75, 182, 220–221). Later, especially after the beginning of the AKP–Gülen conflict, most of these promoted officers involved in the 15 July attempted coup and were arrested (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018; S. Ertürk, personal communication, 15 May, 2018; H. Solmaztürk, personal communication, 6 May, 2018; A. Yavuz, personal communication, 3 May, 2018). In addition, some experts use the collapsing of the obey–command structure and the purge of experienced commanders during Ergenekon to explain Turkey's passive stance in the Aegean Sea toward Greece and its alleged loss of several small islands (Başbuğ, Sözcü, 10.01.2018).

#### 4. Education and Training

According to the new OHAL rules, all the military colleges (high schools) and academies were closed. Instead, all the educational processes of officer and non-commissioned officer candidates were united under a new National Defense University (NDU). The university comprised the Land, Navy, and the Air military schools as well as the institutes that train officers for the general staff (*Kurmay*). The rector of the university is chosen by the President (See: KHK 703, 2016).

Given these changes, the military's autonomy in the field of education has been limited. The appointment of the lecturers, trainers, researchers, and other academic personnel was subordinated to civilian authorities. Moreover, currently, civilian lecturers in the military schools are appointed permanently, while military trainers are appointed provisionally (KHK 703, article: 68, 2016). Furthermore, all of the regulations, educational curriculums, appointments, and decisions unrelated to military education were connected to the Ministry of Defense (KHK 703, articles: 68, 71–73, 76–84, 88–104, 2016). This also means that the overall framework of the NDU is designed according to the YÖK (University Supreme Institution) system (A. Önen, personal communication, 2018).

There are various positive, neutral, and negative opinions regarding the NDU. Indeed, our interviews show that the NDU is the most beneficial structure of the OHAL amendments. Nevertheless, there are a number of things that must be considered to prevent poor combat performance in the future (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018). Many of my interviewees had positive feedback about the NDU. For instance, the NDU can be a good opportunity for academic progress because intellectual deficiency is still a major problem for the military (A. Mevlütoğlu, personal communication, 10 July, 2018; N. Özçelik, personal communication, 19 July, 2018; A. Yavuz, personal communication, 3 May, 2018). The main problem with the NDU is impatient behaviour because the Navy, Air, and Land Forces have different institutional cultures, and combining them under one single body may require sufficient time for all parties to adapt (S. Dikinciler, personal communication, 2018, July 28; Gürcan & Griscion, 2016: 7; A. Önen, personal communication, 2018). Additionally, officers should be trained primarily by military experts who understand the professional ethos of the military culture as well as the requirements of combat effectiveness (Bingöl & Varlık, 2017: 74–75; H. Bulucu, personal communication, 28 July, 2018).

Nevertheless, there are serious doubts about this matter. Some experts argue that civilians educating soldiers is against the nature of the military profession (Başbuğ, Sözcü, 10.01.2018). Based on our interviews, the main deficiencies of the NDU seem to be the quality of resources, the eligibility of lecturers, secular structure, military culture, cohesion and esprit de corps, professional vision, curriculum, professional autonomy, parliamentary supervision, and relations with citizens and the press. For instance, the Air Force curriculum is primarily designed to include engineering and computer lessons, unlike the previous system. Under these conditions, training a combat pilot could be problematic because in the past, 30–40 per cent of lessons pertained to combat and flight. Additionally, the practical summer camp is now limited to five weeks per year, while in the past, the summer camp lasted a minimum of three months. This scheme may prevent pilot candidates from obtaining sufficient flight experience. Similarly, the Land and Naval Forces also have shortened summer camps, limited practical training, and civilianised curriculums. As has been mentioned by many experts, this framework may lead to poor performance during combat (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018). This negative scenario became especially evident after the NDU trained a remarkable number of officer graduates.

In addition to the abovementioned points, the riskiest development regarding the NDU and combat prowess might be the threat of politicisation or the impact of politics on military education (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018; H. Bulucu, personal communication, 28 July, 2018). In the past, Gülenist members gained entrance into military schools by cheating on the exams or by exerting psychological pressure on non-Gülenist members to quit. The increasingly political

environment fostered by the Gülenists eventually led them to be powerful enough to attempt a coup (Demirağ, 2015). In this regard, several criticisms have now been made against the AKP and Erdoğan. In our interviews, some radical respondents, who wish to remain anonymous, completely associated this new structure with political purposes. According to similar claims, the purge of Gülenist officers has served as an excuse for the AK Party government to redesign the military using its own sympathisers. As was seen in the 15 July uprising, the politicisation and factionalisation of officers not only negatively affects combat performance but also makes the military vulnerable to new coup attempts.

### 5. Health Services

According to article 106 of OHAL rule, the main military hospital, the Gülhane Military Medical Academy (GATA), and all of its subsequent institutions, including the military research hospitals, military rehabilitation centres, dispensaries, health services, and gendarmerie health institutions, were closed. All military activities regarding health services have been directly subordinated to the Ministry of Health (*Resmi Gazete* number: 29898, article: 106–108, 24.11.2016). Although all these changes were made to purge Gülenist members, there are certain points that should be discussed because deciding the physical requirements for a certain military task could demand an expert in a related field. The purpose of the GATA was to train professional staff who had enough medical and military knowledge to understand the physical requirements of the military. Hence, it should be investigated whether workers the civilian health sector have enough experience to hold this responsibility. If not, this transition should occur in a patient, cautious manner to create the necessary infrastructure. My interviews and relevant literature support this argument. A few respondents found the amendment harmless to combat effectiveness (R. Aslantaş, personal communication, 4 May, 2018; N. Özçelik, personal communication, 19 July, 2018). However, a significant majority argued that such regulation could be risky. Indeed, some interviewees considered this change to be the most perilous regulation of OHAL regarding combat prowess because civilian and military health services have very distinct practical differences (H. Bulucu, personal communication, 28 July, 2018; Y. Çillilier, personal communication, 19 July, 2018; S. Dikinciler, personal communication, 28 July, 2018; S. Egeli, personal communication, 28 July, 2018; S. Ertürk, personal communication, 15 May, 2018; A. Mevlütoğlu, personal communication, 10 July, 2018; H. Solmaztürk, personal communication, 6 May, 2018; A. Yavuz, personal communication, 3 May, 2018). The negative consequences of this new structure, indeed, have begun to be seen during operations (A. Mevlütoğlu, personal communication, 11 July, 2018, July 11) because a civilian staff does not have technical knowledge regarding first aid, emergency operations, or the evacuation of wounded soldiers (A. Yavuz, personal communication, 3 May, 2018). These technical issues could be post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal tendencies, specific infections, snake or scorpion poisoning, being struck by lightning, burns, tendons and orthopedy, pilotage, etc. In an interview, retired general A. Yavuz (personal communication, 3 May, 2018) reflected that once he saw a wounded police in Diyarbakır who refused surgery from civilian doctors and demanded to be carried to a military hospital because he only considered the latter to have sufficient professional knowledge regarding his wounds. In addition, several events have caused doubts about the current level of hygiene and nutrition quality. Unlike previous years, poisoning incidents have been occurring frequently within the military barracks in the last few years (A. Yavuz, personal communication, 3 May, 2018).

Indeed, the past Gülenist influence on the GATA is particularly important to understand why military health services benefit from the preservation of a militarist structure. For instance, according to a prosecution that is in progress in the Ankara 20 Supreme Criminal Court, the Gülenist healthcare workers in the GATA were dismissing healthy officers who were not members of their organisation. Conversely, according to the confession of a non-commissioned officer, Serdar K., despite his colour blindness, he was reported to be healthy due to his relationship with the Gülenists. According to the

same prosecutions, the Gülenist personnel were prescribing incorrect medications to the non-Gülenist pilot candidates to make them ‘physically unhealthy for flight’. This incident and the abovementioned interviewee explanations demonstrate the sensitivity of this matter. For an effective combat force, the health services behind the front lines should be implemented by professionals. This requires separate education regarding technical knowledge and expertise in combat wounds. Perhaps the new system will embrace these requirements in the long term, but in the short term, the military’s combat power might be negatively affected.

### 6. Operations Fırat Kalkanı and Zeytindalı: Success or Failure?

After these changes were implemented, the Turkish army was put to the test twice; both instances occurred at the south-eastern borders with the aim of stopping a potential Kurdish threat by the PYD/PKK. The first Operation Fırat Kalkanı was conducted with the purpose of halting PYD progress toward the western side of the Fırat River by creating a block zone. The second Operation Zeytindalı was attempted on the city of Afrin to remove PYD presence from this strategic area. The success of these operations is contested. Moreover, it is still problematic whether the new OHAL amendments can be tested in such short-term operations. Indeed, some of our interviewees thought these operations were easy for the Turkish army, and, thus, they did not consider these operations to be criteria to the judgement of the military’s combat effectiveness. On the other hand, operations nevertheless became a testing area for the joint operation (*müşterek harekât*) among the Air and Land Forces because these two are now connected under the NDU and are commonly included in curricula (Keyman & Gürcan, 2017: 19). Additionally, the operations became a testing method for the military’s new health services.

Considering the interviews and relevant literature, Operation Zeytindalı is considered more successful in terms of obtaining targets. Operation Fırat Kalkanı received a remarkable amount of criticism from the experts. The most common problems pointed out by the critics were the high rate of casualty (71 soldiers) and injury, poor logistic service, a lack of coordination, poor planning, delay in sending backup forces, poor civil–military cooperation, poor performance from ARGE (the Technology and Research Institution), a lack of intelligentsia, insufficient equipment, a lack of coordination in the joint operation, a lack of a combination of conventional operations carried out by elite units, and mutual cooperation with foreign allies (Bingöl & Varlık, 2017: 83–86; Gürcan, 2018: 13–15; Özçelik & Acun, 2018: 9). All these deficiencies have, more or less, been associated with the recent OHAL amendments. Another important issue is the several defects associated with providing health support in combat zones (A. Mevlütoğlu, personal communication, 11 July, 2018).

On the other hand, the comments about Operation Zeytindalı are relatively optimistic because the Turkish Air Force successfully destroyed key targets and broke the opponent’s resistance at a very early stage of the operation. According to the experts, the surprise attack by Turkish fighter jets did not leave any opportunity for resistance (Kasapoğlu & Ülgen, 2018: 3–6; Özçelik and Acun, 2018: 9–10). These optimistic comments may cause one to think that the abovementioned weaknesses of Operation Fırat Kalkanı were fixed to a certain extent. In particular, several technical issues, such as field intelligence, technological superiority, and successful air attacks, have been positive aspects of this operation. Indeed, the relative success of this operation presents several indicators about the Turkish military doctrine that supposedly thought in the NDU. In short, these indicators are fire power; high manoeuvrability; and the manoeuvrability of commando, local tactical, tank, and mechanical units based on the size of the region (Özçelik & Acun, 2018: 48). If the educational curriculum at the NDU were designed according to these principles and did not take into account political concerns, this would doubtlessly have positive effects on the military’s future operations. Yet, it is too early to consider such a possibility because the potential risks that we pointed out at the beginning of this paper remain. Hence, considering the results of an operation that occurred at Turkish borders against a weaker and smaller target could be misleading and, thus, could distract



individuals from accurately calculating potential risks in the future. As was noticed by my interviewees, the NDU and other regulations are too new, and it may take some time for their effects to come to light. Future researchers should at least wait until this system stabilises and a sufficient number of officers graduate from the NDU. Moreover, categorising these operations as failures or successes should be avoided. In some areas, they are successful, and in other areas, they are not. To understand the current power of the Turkish military regarding combat effectiveness, a more complex and long-term operation against a professional and technologically well-equipped army must be observed.

## 7. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I aimed to indicate the impacts the OHAL amendments have had on the Turkish army since 2016, especially on its combat effectiveness. In doing so, I aimed to understand the potential political determinants of combat effectiveness in CMR. Due to its fluctuating nature, the situation in Turkey presents us with significant cases by which to test this research question. In particular, the arrests of top military commanders during the Ergenekon case, the Gülenist penetration, and the latter's coup attempt on 15 July 2016 eventually created a highly complex framework of CMR. The radical OHAL amendments designed to save the army from the Gülenist organisation not only resulted in a more civilianised army but also sparked debate about the possible politicisation of the military. An analysis of this case has provided important indicators regarding political influence and combat prowess. Due to the novelty of the case and the ongoing political circumstances in Turkey, I conducted my analysis by discussing potential outcomes and avoiding passing certain judgements ourselves. My methodological approach was primarily based on interviews with several experts as well as their writings as part of the relevant literature. Furthermore, we conducted a brief analysis of Operations Fırat Kalkanı and Zeytindalı.

Thus far, my results regarding combat effectiveness indicate that the Turkish army could become vulnerable to a poor combat performance in the future due to increasing political influence. As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, each branch of the military should have an autonomy regarding certain matters in order to preserve its professional ethos. A professional ethos is indeed the key to the success for an army during combat. Professional ethos can be seen a combination of several principles, including discipline, hierarchy, esprit de corps, and cohesion. To protect these principles from eroding, a military should have independence in purely military matters, which are related to preparing for and engaging in war. Any external influence on these matters could make military vulnerable to poor combat performance. Furthermore, increasing civilian interference may risk politicisation, which would eventually divide the military into competing factions. As a result, the obey–command structure, discipline, and hierarchy could collapse.

Considering my interviews, the riskiest areas for the Turkish army might be arbitrary promotions and dismissals, which give preference to political concerns over military eligibility. First, the president of Turkey has exclusive powers of appointments of top generals. Second, although the NDU has some significant advantages regarding the increase of intellectual capacity, it could be problematic if too much concern for politics penetrates military education and the officer candidates do not have an adequate level of education regarding the theoretical and practical aspects of combat. Third, the civilianisation of the health sector could be hazardous if the civilian doctors do not have relevant expertise about working in combat zones and treating combat wounds. Indeed, there have already been several negative developments in the last few years, including the increased frequency of poisoning in the barracks. Lastly, Operations Zeytindalı and Fırat Kalkanı present us with complicated evidence. Many authorities consider Operation Fırat Kalkanı unsuccessful. Operation Zeytindalı, on the other hand, is considered more satisfactory in that it reached the targets. However, both these operations are very recent, and it is doubtful whether they were extensive enough or had sufficient duration to test the impacts of OHAL. As a result, Turkish politicians, especially President

Erdoğan, should avoid taking into account political concerns during the preparation of the military because now, the current structure offers them the necessary tools to do so.

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