

**Karabekir Akkoyunlu, Military Reform and Democratisation: Turkish and Indonesian Experiences at the Turn of the Millennium. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007.  
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Karabekir Akkoyunlu renders a concise comparison of military reform and democratization in Turkey and Indonesia by examining the influence of societal, global, and state actors in the two countries. He investigates the traditional roles of the Turkish and Indonesian militaries and the dynamics that underline those roles. In the end, although optimistic, he warns us that the end result of military reform and democratization in Turkey and Indonesia is far from decided.

Why Turkey and Indonesia? Both countries are non-Arab yet predominantly Muslim; their societies are “moderate” in religious fervour; they have secular regimes; and both are considered “developing” nations. More important, according to Akkoyunlu, is that “the Turkish and Indonesian militaries have been continually involved – in a direct and indirect fashion – in the political affairs of their countries since the inception of both republics” (9).

Differences between Turkey and Indonesia make Akkoyunlu’s comparison even more interesting. While Turkey is the direct successor of the Ottoman Empire, Indonesia emerged as a single political unit for the first time in 1949. Turkey is at the troublesome crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. It is the second largest military force in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a candidate for European Union (EU) membership, and – despite regular military interventions – a

multi-party democracy for over 60 years. Southeast Asia, at least after 1975, has been more tranquil for Indonesia. But Akkoyunlu reminds us that Indonesia's "relative geopolitical isolation is often overshadowed by the immense task of keeping a sprawling archipelago and diverse population intact under a single nationhood and central government" (9). Indeed, Indonesia is linguistically, ethnically, and religiously more diverse than Turkey. Furthermore, in contrast to Turkey's longer tradition of multi-party politics, Indonesia has experienced a similar degree of political openness only in the last ten years.

After justifying his choice of subjects, Akkoyunlu sets his theoretical framework by defining key terms. He uses the political scientist Jean Grugel's definition of democratization, a process undertaken to achieve liberal democracy, as opposed to socialist, participatory, or communitarian democracy.<sup>1</sup> In the context of democratization, military reform aims to turn the military's activities away from policymaking and law enforcement. In a "normal" democracy, the military is subordinated to the political authority of the elected government and it is only responsible with the defence of the country against foreign aggression.

Akkoyunlu discusses Turkey's case next. When the Ottoman Emperor Mahmut II liquidated the incompetent Janissary corps in 1826, he replaced it with a modern, Western-style army. In the following decades, close contact with Western countries caused the Ottoman military to become one of the main avenues through which ideas like nationalism and secularism entered Ottoman discourse. With the collapse of the Empire after the First World War, the Turkish military, under the leadership of General Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), repelled foreign invasion and helped to create the

modern Republic of Turkey in 1923. The reforms that Atatürk instituted after 1923 – the secularization of the state; female emancipation with full political rights; the adoption of the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic script – gave the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK in Turkish) the self-assumed duty of guardian of the secular Republic.

Akkoyunlu adroitly brings out an interesting connection between democracy and the military in Turkey. “It should be recognized,” he tells us, “that the military, or individuals with a military background, were behind most of Turkey’s early strides towards democracy” (36). Because Atatürk set democracy as a key objective of his reforms during his lifetime, TSK has always accepted the legitimacy of civilian rule and has returned to its barracks after every intervention. But since the advent of multi-party democracy in 1946, TSK has also taken its guardianship quite seriously, ousting democratically-elected governments in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. Whenever TSK begins to see civilian incompetence (if not outright conspiracy to weaken secularism), it invokes its duty to protect the country in the name of Atatürk and the Turkish people. To this day, it exercises significant control over the state and remains immune to civilian oversight.

How do Turkish people feel about their military’s power? TSK is still the most popular and trusted institution in Turkey. Akkoyunlu correctly points out that cultural factors account for this phenomenon. “Even today,” he tells us, “men are often sent off for their mandatory military service amid jubilant celebrations” (24). The military’s high level of professionalism, its ability to draw some of the best and brightest high school graduates to the service academies, its meritocracy, altruism, and image of incorruptibility all perpetuate this sentiment. Given these factors, it is easy to see why,

as Akkoyunlu relates, there is inadequate support for democratization and military reform in Turkey. Quite paradoxically, many Turks oppose the idea of lessening TSK's role in domestic politics because it would weaken the guarantor of Turkey's secular democracy.

Akkoyunlu then turns to external factors and argues that they affect Turkey's democratization in mixed ways. And TSK responds to the country's insecure surrounding in an ambivalent manner: On the one hand, it has a tendency to exaggerate external and internal threats. But on the other hand, the Turkish military has been quite active in peacemaking and peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Lebanon since the early 1990s. That ambivalence can be seen in Turkey's complex relationship with the West. On the one hand, many Turks view the EU and the United States somewhat negatively. Calls for further democratization from European circles (the author is correct to claim that such calls from Washington do not exist) meet with suspicion if not outright resentment. On the other hand, high-ranking Turkish officers have supported their country's EU bid (at least publicly) and have accepted certain limitations on their power. But as much as the EU has acted as "the main anchor of Turkish democratization" (31-32), the author warns that Turkey's decreasing fervour to join the European club could halt military reform and democratization.

In discussing Indonesia, Akkoyunlu gives a nice historical summary for the less-informed. The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI in Indonesian) were created after independence in 1949 when local militias fighting the Dutch were united as one army. Following independence, TNI intervened twice in 1958 and 1965. And in the latter case,

General Suharto ousted and replaced President Sukarno, the founder of modern Indonesia. The Indonesian military had justified its 1965 intervention with the claim that it had saved the country from dissolution. Furthermore, TNI based its move on the official state ideology of *Pancasila* (“five principles” in Indonesian) and announced the creation of the authoritarian “New Order” regime. According to Akkoyunlu, “the [Indonesian] military reached the apex of its political and social influence during the New Order regime of President Suharto, [g]radually establish[ing] itself in a position where it was able to dominate all aspects of public life” (46). The new doctrine of *dwifungsi* (“dual function”) gave TNI legitimacy not only as a security and defence force, but also as the nation’s primary social and political institution.

During its thirty-three-year rule of Indonesia, TNI perceived ethnic nationalism, political Islam, and liberalism as the foremost threats to its authority. In cases where separatism and religious fundamentalism were active, especially in Aceh, East Timor, and Irian Jaya (West Papua), TNI responded by brutal repression. Over the years, Indonesia’s political system became more opaque and less receptive to criticism. Akkoyunlu argues that TNI’s direct involvement in government and its appalling record of corruption, mismanagement, and human rights violations eroded its popular support, not to mention its role as a unifying force. “Thus,” he continues, “increasing popular disillusionment with the upholders of the status quo [has been] the main engine of reform in Indonesia since the turn of the millennium” (48).

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 ended Suharto’s dictatorship and TNI’s direct rule. Akkoyunlu informs us that, by the 1990s, even certain factions within the Indonesian military had begun to criticize Suharto and *dwifungsi* for the problems of the

land. When dictatorship ended in 1998, Indonesia abandoned *dwifungsi* and held free elections the following year. Soon, however, the enthusiasm for democracy dissipated and TNI became increasingly reluctant to accept total civilian control of its affairs. Meanwhile, as the tight grip of the old order faded, long-suppressed separatist movements and religious fundamentalism gained momentum.

Unlike Turkey, international dynamics have played a lesser role in Indonesia's democratization and military reform attempts. Globalization has been an agent of change in Indonesia's domestic affairs only to a limited extent. Akkoyunlu indicates that "the Indonesian military's continued disregard for human rights and good governance, and support for a regime that failed to couple economic liberalism with political liberties, put it at odds with changing global values" (54). Akkoyunlu relates the good news that there is more support for democratization and military reform in Indonesia than in Turkey. But a lack of consensus among Indonesians on how to achieve those goals has allowed TNI to remain immune to full civilian control. Even with the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired general and a reformist, the future of democratization and military reform in Indonesia are bleak. From this picture, it can be seen that both TSK and TNI see themselves as "virtually sacrosanct" because of their central role in their countries' histories (65-66). Moreover, they are equally distrustful of their people and hold a sense of ownership over the future of their nations.

Akkoyunlu concludes his study by making the following observations: As much as external support helps, it is the internal drive for democratization and military reform that can bring about change in the two countries. An important reason why Turkey and Indonesia cannot become fully democratic is the lack of agreement about what

democracy means. In fact, even when they talk about democratic reform, Turks and Indonesians only voice a desire for political stability and economic development. Authoritarian governments could also deliver those. Secondly, whereas greater professionalism leads to more efficiency and less corruption in the military, as in the case of Turkey, it can quite paradoxically destroy any reason for military reform. Why fix it if it is not broken? The Turkish military's professionalism is the reason why Turkish people still perceive TSK as the rightful guarantor of the nation and the Republic. Finally, even though the democratization process continues in the two countries, Akkoyunlu warns that a "reverse tide" might be in the making. The U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan in the name of democratization has alienated many people around the world. That factor might hurt democracy's chances in Turkey and Indonesia as well.

In the end, Akkoyunlu suggests that a realist appreciation of a country's reform process is needed. Expecting militaries in countries like Turkey and Indonesia to abandon their dominant positions overnight is simply impractical. In the case of Turkey, Akkoyunlu argues that dismantling constitutional structures, through which TSK directs politics, should be given priority. In Indonesia, persuading military leaders that doing away with the authoritarian legacy of the New Order regime will in fact sustain *Pancasila*, and that will strengthen, rather than weaken, TNI as an institution.

Akkoyunlu's work is well-written and draws from a wide collection of experts of Turkish and Indonesian affairs. The only shortcoming of this otherwise fine study is that Akkoyunlu could have been bolder about his suggestions to effect democratization and military reform. To that end, he allocates only three pages at the very end to his conclusions. An extended discussion of concrete measures on how to realize

democratization and military reform in Turkey and Indonesia could have made this admirable study even better.

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## **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Grugel, Democratisation: A Critical Introduction (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 2.