



Erdogan's Coup Proofing: Why should Greece care?

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Summary

- President Erdogan's policies regarding civil-military relations subsequent to the failed 2016 coup fit the taxonomy of 'coup proofing', which is to say of measures undertaken to protect a regime from a potential military coup.
- The literature on coup proofing has identified officer selection, military training, coordination between commanders and units, and information sharing as the four key domains in which coup proofing is most prevalent.
- Coup proofing usually has severely negative effects on the battlefield effectiveness of an Armed Forces. However, the literature has also identified ways by which regimes can coup-proof themselves without undermining the battlefield effectiveness of their Armed Forces. These include indoctrination with a view to instilling loyalty in the regime and coopting military officers through career and other inducements.
- This policy paper will analyse how President Erdogan has coup-proofed his regime, as per the literature, with diverse impacts--mostly negative, but to a lesser degree positive--on the combat effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces.
- Additionally, the policy paper will consider the potential impact of President Erdogan's coup-proofing policies on Greece's national security.

Introduction

Since the failed coup attempt of 2016, President Erdogan has implemented a thorough set of coup-proofing measures to protect himself and his regime from a future coup attempt; these have had a massive impact on the Turkish Armed Forces.

This policy paper will argue that President Erdogan's coup-proofing measures should figure prominently in the deliberations of Greece's civilian and military leadership for two reasons.

First, because President Erdogan's coup proofing has undeniably undermined the battlefield effectiveness of Turkey's Armed Forces (TAF) in specific ways which are either easy to identify or can be further explored and investigated using the analytical toolkit provided by the coup-proofing literature.

Second, because these coup-proofing policies, during a period in which Turkey has become highly assertive in terms of its claims against Greece, or in terms of its behaviour in the field, have imposed structural constraints on Turkey's ability to impose its will on Greece militarily. Of course, this raises the question of how self-aware the Turkish leadership is about the degree of damage it has wrought on the competence of the Turkish Armed Forces.

The policy paper will proceed as follows.

The first section will review some key tenets of the coup-proofing literature with a focus on differentiating those coup-proofing measures which undermine the battlefield effectiveness of an Armed Force from those that do not.

The second section will establish how good a fit President Erdogan's post-2016 TAF-related policies are for the taxonomy of coup-proofing measures implemented by a populist, authoritarian regime.

The third section will analyse how coup proofing has impacted the effectiveness of TAF, based on a review of the voluminous literature on Turkish civil-military relations in the post-2016 coup era.

The fourth section will connect the analysis of President Erdogan's post-2016 coup-proofing policies with the overall emergence of Turkey as an assertive and highly revisionist power, and how these two interacting factors affect Greece's national security.

The concluding section will sum up the paper's analysis.

Coup-proofing measures and their effects

Almost Immediately after the failed July 2016 coup in Turkey, alert observers reviewed the possible impact of the coup-proofing measures President Erdogan was certain to implement on the effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces. They did so on the basis of the extant literature on the coup-proofing phenomenon¹. Our own reading of the same bibliography will synthesize key tenets of this literature along with features that are highly relevant to the strategic rivalry between Greece and Turkey.

Almost Immediately after the failed July 2016 coup in Turkey, alert observers reviewed the possible impact of the coup-proofing measures President Erdogan was certain to implement on the effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces.

¹ See, D. Orbach, What coup-proofing will do to Turkey's military: lessons from five countries, *War on the Rocks*, 27.9.2016.

...coup-proofing measures are to be found mostly in regimes and countries which have already experienced a coup attempt in their recent history.

... coup-proofing measures in these four domains compound each other in corroding the battlefield effectiveness of a country's Armed Forces.

According to the foundational work of Caitlin Talmadge², coup proofing--the set of measures implemented to eliminate the threat of a coup taking place and overturning a regime--will tend to affect foundational pillars of the battlefield effectiveness of a country's Armed Forces. In particular, these measures tend to have a decisively negative impact on officer promotion patterns, training regimes, command arrangements and information management. Such coup-proofing measures are to be found mostly in regimes and countries which have already experienced a coup attempt in their recent history.

Officer promotions criteria will be based on loyalty to a regime as opposed to military competence, for the very obvious reason that officers who may be disloyal will be prime candidates for planning and executing a coup. Perceived disloyalty puts a negative premium on competence, as competent officers would be the most able to execute a successful coup, due to their executive abilities and the loyalty engendered by their leadership competence to fellow officers and other ranks, whose participation is needed to execute a coup.

Training may be undermined, as well-trained units are better able to execute a complex operation of any kind, including a coup, and training exercises can mask a coup attempt.

Flexible command will be curtailed, with excessive centralization and rapid officer rotation being favoured instead to limit the ability of officers to coordinate, lest coordination between officers enables coup planning and execution.

Information sharing will also be limited, as unimpeded information flows can assist coordination across units and rapid decision-making--both capabilities that are very useful to coup plotters.

Inevitably, coup-proofing measures in these four domains compound each other in corroding the battlefield effectiveness of a country's Armed Forces, as incompetent officers lead undertrained troops, units cannot coordinate to achieve battlefield effects, and information gathered is hoarded by the regime instead of being distributed to those commanders and joint commands that can make best use of it.

Once coup-proofing measures of this sort have been left to do their work, analysts should be able to answer why countries with similar resource endowments diverge in their ability to convert resources into effective combat power or, even more strikingly, why less well-resourced countries are able to defeat better-resourced countries on the battlefield.

Thus, in her comparison of the divergent battlefield effectiveness of the opposing South and North Vietnamese forces³, Talmadge was able to establish that:

- Successive South Vietnamese governments did not mitigate their coup-proofing practices, as they considered that US participation in the war would make a North Vietnamese victory impossible. Typically, underperformance in the field would invite US intervention, as in the case of the US Air Force providing air support, proving the point that the combat effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) was not a must for regime survival in the face of the external threat posed by North Vietnam.

² C. Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army--Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*, Cornell University Press, 2015

³ Ibid, pp.41-71

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- Service Schools directors were not selected on merit, performance assessments of battlefield performance were not conducted, and offers of US training were turned down.
- Elite forces, such as paratrooper units, were used to protect the government from an attempted coup, rather than being deployed in the field where they could be most useful.
- Key appointments, particularly in ARVN formations proximate to the capital, Saigon, were made on the grounds of loyalty not competence and severe underperformance on the battlefield did not lead to dismissals, as underperforming commanders were prized for their loyalty not competence.
- Secret cells in the officer staff of key formations informed on their superiors to the Presidency, thus making commanders leery of undertaking initiatives and coordinating with fellow officers in a way that would invite suspicion of coup plotting.

Regimes can allow the emergence of competent battlefield formations when such formations do not represent a coup threat.

A quantitative study⁴ of war outcomes in the post-WW II era has established that, of the thirteen coup-proofing criteria, three have been shown to negatively affect war outcomes, to the extent of engendering an average 28 % decline in the probability of prevailing in a war for the armed forces affected. These three are: first, unmeritocratic appointments in the officer corps; second, the past involvement of an Armed Forces in a coup; and, third, mass purges of the officer corps of the Armed Forces.

With the negative effects of coup-proofing measures duly noted, Talmadge and others have probed the conditions under which regimes, which have reason to fear a coup, can take measures that will coup-proof them without compromising combat effectiveness⁵. We will pick out the following conclusions:

- Regimes can allow the emergence of competent battlefield formations when such formations do not represent a coup threat. For example, the 1st division was a distinguished outlier in terms of the ineffective combat performance of the ARVN; this was because it was allowed competent leadership as its operations were geographically distant from Saigon, meaning it did not present a threat to the regime.
- Strongly institutionalized regimes can be reasonable sure that officers would not lead a coup attempt, and can thus allow their Armed Forces to be effectively led, trained and equipped. North Vietnam, due to the communist party's unquestioned supremacy and the internalization of this supremacy by its officer corps, could and did deploy armed forces in the field in which competent leadership, effective training and coordination were the rule not the exception; in the light of its brittle personalistic rule, South Vietnam usually could not do the same.
- Generally speaking, regimes that face an overwhelming external threat and/or have territorial ambitions that are reliant on effective combat performance would select coup-proofing measures that do not undermine combat effectiveness. Nazi Germany is an exceptional case in point, in that it fielded formidably effective

⁴ V. Narang and C. Talmadge, Civil-Military Pathologies and Defeat in war: Tests using new data, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1-27, 2017

⁵ See, C. Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army-Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*, Cornell University Press, 2015 and D. Reiter, Avoiding the coup-proofing dilemma: consolidating political control while maximizing military power, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16, pp. 312-331, 2020.

forces despite the potential threat of a military coup against the regime. Nazi ideology, which was particularly prevalent among the lower ranks, provided significant coup protection, since potential coup plotters could not be certain they could carry their subordinates with them in an attempt to oust Hitler. Hitler also amply rewarded his officers with promotions and material perks on the basis of battlefield performance, thus coopting them to his regime.

- Unlike Stalin in the 1930s or Erdogan post-2016, both of whom implemented massive officer purges, Hitler avoided purges that would undermine the effectiveness of his Armed Forces, even after the assassination attempt against him in 1944. Given his coopting measures and the protection afforded to him by the dominant Nazi ideology, he was confident enough to give great command authority to his meritocratically selected commanders, along with leeway to train their troops in the way they deemed fit.

During the first phase of AKP rule, which began in 2002 and ended in 2006, coup proofing was provided first and foremost by the country's EU accession process, which was viewed as reasonably likely to lead to EU membership at the time.

The Turkish case: Coup proofing under populist rule

While the policies implemented in Turkey after the failed coup attempt of 2016 will be a main focus of our analysis of the impact of coup proofing on TAF, it is important to trace the pre-2016 history of civil-military relations under Erdogan and AKP rule.

During the first phase of AKP rule, which began in 2002 and ended in 2006, coup proofing was provided first and foremost by the country's EU accession process, which was viewed as reasonably likely to lead to EU membership at the time. This accession process led, first and foremost, to an AKP-led alliance which included the country's secular business elite and significant sections of Turkey's academic establishment⁶. Furthermore, it was endorsed by international portfolio and corporate investors, which directed significant capital flows into the Turkish economy⁷. Last but not least, it was supported by the powerful Chief of the General Staff, General Hilmi Ozkok, as well by an influential cohort of acting and retired military officers who, through their participation on the Boards of major Turkish corporations, either private or owned by the Armed Forces pension fund (OYAK), had joined the globalization bandwagon⁸. In this first phase, and against this favourable backdrop, significant measures were implemented to buttress civilian rule. These included the reform of the National Security Council which could no longer be used as an institutional instrument of military intervention in politics.

However, the increased democratic accountability of TAF that was supposed to be ushered in by increased transparency in defence fiscal allocations, the strengthened legislative oversight over the Armed Forces, and the acceptance of greater civil society input in the debate on national defence policy, did not come about⁹. Budgetary allocations continued to be too broad to allow for evidence-based debate, Parliament's National Defence Committee lacked expertise and continued to serve as a rubber stamp for defence-related legislative

⁶K. Caliskan, Explaining the end of the military tutelage regime and the July 2015 coup attempt in Turkey, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Vol 10, No 1, pp. 97-211, 2017

⁷I. N. Grigoriadis and A. Kamaras, Foreign Direct Investment in Turkey: Historical Constraints and the AKP Success Story, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 44, Issue 1, 2008.

⁸K. Caliskan, Explaining the end of the military tutelage regime and the July 2015 coup attempt in Turkey, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, Vol 10, No 1, pp. 97-211, 2017.

⁹ See indicatively, T. Eldem, Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces, in C. Aurel, and D. Kuehn *Reforming civil-military relations in new democracies--Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness in Comparative Perspectives*. Cham: Springer, 2017.

bills, and the Court of Auditors was denied the wide-ranging data it required to conduct effective audits on major weapon procurement contracts¹⁰.

...these prosecutions resulted in the humiliation of the TAF officer corps, as well as their pinnacle institution, the General Staff.

In contrast, in the second phase of civil-military relations under President Erdogan's leadership, Turkey's EU accession process faded and President Erdogan began to increase his dominance over the AKP as he sought to escape the confines of his *primus inter pares* role. Civilian control over an Armed Forces which, as it was no longer invested in the EU accession process, was rediscovering a taste for political intervention, came to rely on the abuse of institutions rather than the strengthening of institutional integrity and mission to consolidate democratic rule¹¹. With the assistance of Gulenists police officers and prosecutors, the AKP government used evidence of army plots to overthrow democratic rule (the so-called Ergenekon and Balyoz conspiracies, which are now widely acknowledged to have been fabricated) to mastermind the trial and eventual imprisonment of dozens of acting and retired officers. Importantly, these prosecutions resulted in the humiliation of the TAF officer corps, as well as their pinnacle institution, the General Staff, which proved powerless to protect those fellow officers, acting and retired, who found themselves in the dock on flimsy or completely unfounded charges. In a precursor of the negative impact of the post-2016 coup-proofing measures, the trials resulted in major exercises being cancelled over 2011 due to the number of officers who were cashiered; to 2,119 officers leaving TAF voluntarily in 2010-2012; to applications to military schools in 2012 being 30 % lower than they were in 2007; and to the shortening of the time officers had to wait for promotion in 2014, due to rank depletion¹².

...civilianization via populism and the centralization of power became constitutive of civil & military relations in the post-2016-coup era.

The 2016 coup, its execution and failure, added two mutually constituted elements to this trajectory: First, a super powerful Presidency held by Erdogan and approved by referendum in 2017, whose personalist rule led to de-institutionalization across the state apparatus¹³ and, second, widespread changes and officer purges which had a decisive impact on TAF¹⁴. Popular reaction and resistance to the coup plotters and military units engaged in the coup further strengthened the identification of President Erdogan with the popular will, thus easing the way for the concentration of power in his person, the weakening of his AKP party, and the undermining of institutions within TAF and beyond¹⁵. In this way, civilianization via populism and the centralization of power became constitutive of civil & military relations in the post-2016-coup era. One feature of this new regime worth highlighting is the undermining of TAFs' authority to select its own leadership in accordance with its own corporate perception of the credentials which should guarantee entry to its upper echelons – an elite formation process *par excellence*. This was supplanted by the President's authority to pick and choose the military hierarchy down the chain of command on the basis of their personal loyalty to him and fealty to his project. This Presidential authority could only be delegated to the President's loyalists, be they from his own AKP party or its ally, the nationalist MHP party with its extensive connections in the officer corps,, who replaced institutional processes with networks designed to advance or sabotage military careers. This populist centralization anchored in a personality cult, cemented by the defeat of the coup plotters, and buttressed via genuine or manufactured enemies of President Erdogan's

¹⁰ Ibid., p.183

¹¹ For an analysis of how the Armed Forces' tendency to intervene in politics interacted with Erdogan's own designs to defang their autonomy, see S. Waldman and E. Caliskan, *Factional and Unprofessional: Turkey's military and the July 2016 attempted coup*, *Democracy and Security*, 2019.

¹² T. Eldem, *Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces*, in C. Aurel, and D. Kuehn. "Reforming civil-military relations in new democracies - Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness in Comparative Perspectives", Cham: Springer, 2017.

¹³ See, S. Koru, *The institutional structure of 'New Turkey'*, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 2021.

¹⁴ For an analysis of President Erdogan's determinative influence in civil-military relations in Turkey, see H. Tas, *Populism and civil – military relations*, *Democratization*, Vol. 31, No 1, pp. 70-89, 2024.

¹⁵ See, S. Ozturk and T. Reilly, *Assessing centralization: on Turkey's rising personalist regime*, *South East European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 167-185, 2024

political power and definition of national interest both inside and outside Turkey, has in turn allowed the workings of TAF to be completely subordinated to President Erdogan's will and interest.

We highlight, in particular¹⁶:

1. The dismissal of 142 out of 356 Army, Air Force and Navy generals and admirals as coup plotters: 40 % of their cohort.
2. The abolition of all officer schools and the creation of an umbrella National Defence University.
3. The conferring on the Office of the Presidency of the authority to decide on officers' promotions down the ladder and not only vis-a-vis the Service Chiefs who compose the General Staff, down to the appointment of lieutenant colonels¹⁷.
4. The separation of the Gendarmerie from the Armed Forces and the further strengthening of the Police, which became increasingly militarized in its equipment and training¹⁸.
5. The granting of authority to MIT, the state intelligence agency, to monitor and exercise surveillance over TAF¹⁹.

...many of the cashiered and/or prosecuted officers post-2016 were known for their Atlanticist orientation, had studied in military schools in the US and occupied positions integrally connected with NATO.

These measures must be further analyzed and linked to additional political and military decisions undertaken by an all-powerful President Erdogan.

President Erdogan's conviction that the coup represented not only an attempt by Gulenist elements to usurp his rule, but was also implemented with the collusion of the US, where Fethullah Gulen maintained his residence, meant that many of the cashiered and/or prosecuted officers post-2016 were known for their Atlanticist orientation, had studied in military schools in the US and occupied positions integrally connected with NATO and the US, be they in NATO or as military attaches, and had been appointed to head Armed Forces transformation programmes based on their NATO knowhow²⁰.

In addition to the loss of these Western-oriented officer cohorts, the post-coup environment included a degraded governance whereby officers' personnel files and other sensitive documents and recorded conversations were leaked to destroy careers and discredit particular officers, while officers would be compelled to report to the civilian authorities on the political loyalty of their peers in order to prove their own loyalty to President Erdogan and his rule²¹.

A third feature of the post-coup era was the impact it had on the Turkish Air Force. Uniquely for a coup, with putsches usually instigated by Land Force units, Turkish Air Force planes played a role in the coup, in which a KC135R refuelling tanker aircraft was used to support

¹⁶ See, for an account and analysis of post 2016 policies relating to coup proofing, A. Kars Kaynar, Post 2016 military restructuring in Turkey from the perspective of coup proofing, *Turkish Studies*, 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ For police military relations before and after the coup, see A. G. Yilmaz, Competing roles of the police and the army? A historical analysis of the Turkish case, *Scandinavian Journal of Security Studies*, Vol. 3. Issue 1, 2020, H. Eissestat, Uneasy rests the crown: Erdogan and 'Revolutionary Security in Turkey, *Project on Middle East Democracy*, December 2017 and A. G. Yilmaz, The Missing piece of the puzzle: the AMASYA Protocol and Civil Military Relations in Turkey, *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol 1. Issue 19, 2022.

¹⁹ Y. GURSOY, The 15 July 2016 failed coup and the Security sector, *The Rutledge Handbook of Turkish Politics*, Rutledge, 2019.

²⁰ See, S. J. Flanagan, F.S. Larrabee, A. Binnerdijk, K. Costello, S. Efron, J. Hoobler, M. Kirchner, J. Martini, A. Nader, P. A. Wilson, Turkey's Nationalist Course - Implications for the US-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the US Army, *Rand Corporation*, 2020, M. Gurcan and M. Giscion, What is the Turkish Military's strategic identity after July 15, *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief*, September 2016 and M. Gurcan, Never again! But how? State and the military in Turkey after July 15, *Istanbul Policy Center*, April 2017.

²¹ T. Eldem, Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces, in C. Aurel, and D. Kuehn. "Reforming civil-military relations in new democracies - Democratic Control and Military Effectiveness in Comparative Perspectives. Cham: Springer, 2017.

The extensive involvement on the part of Turkey's Air Force in the coup resulted in the cashiering of hundreds of fighter pilots.

pro-coup F16s, A400 and C-160 cargo planes were used to transport munitions for use by coup units, F16s and military helicopters actually attacking pro-government targets in Ankara, including the police headquarters, and F16's coming close to shooting down the Presidential jet²². This extensive involvement on the part of Turkey's Air Force in the coup resulted in the cashiering of hundreds of fighter pilots and probably contributed to the selection of the Russian S400 ground to air defence system²³. Specifically, it has been speculated that the S400 Russian Federation ground-to-air missile system was chosen for its possible use as a coup-proofing weapons platform: i.e. for its ability to shoot down any Turkish Air Force fighter jets that might participate in a future coup. Subsequent to the S400 procurement decision, the US government ejected the Turkish Air Force and the Turkish defence industry from the F35 fighter programme, annulling the attendant co-production agreements and refusing repeated requests made in the years that followed for the Turkey's F16s fleet to be upgraded and new aircraft acquired. At a minimum, we can assert that had it not been for President Erdogan's conviction that the US had contributed to the coup, such a momentous decision affecting both the future of Turkey's Air Force and Turkey's relationship with the US security establishment, would never have been taken.

Contemporaneously, an alternative nexus of geopolitics, military doctrine and operations, and defence industry sector engagement further evolved²⁴. This nexus was composed of the following key elements: a) an alliance between the AKP government and the extreme nationalist MHP party, privileging suppression of the Kurds within Turkey and resulting in the revival of the counterinsurgency as a primary tool for managing the Kurdish minority in the Turkish South East;²⁵ b) the deployment of TAF in counterinsurgency operations in the Turkish South East but also in Syria, with these operations featuring technological and operational innovation in combined arms anchored in Turkish-designed and manufactured Unmanned Combat Air Vehicles (UCAVs);²⁶ c) the engagement, via proxies or allies, of TAF in intrastate and inter-state conflicts, namely in Syria and Azerbaijan; d) the advancement of geopolitical and geoeconomic goals through this engagement which clashed with the sovereign claims of two of Turkey's historic antagonists, Greece and Armenia. Both were also perceived as instruments of the West and, relatedly, were able to mobilize support to counter Turkish designs, with the assistance of their powerful diaspora communities, in such key Western states as the US (Greece and Armenia) and France (Armenia); e) the linking of a fast-growing defence industry (connected to the AKP or even the President himself) with Turkey's geopolitical aims, ranging from the suppression of Kurdish secessionism via extensive deployment of UCAVs to the manufacture of frigates and corvettes in Turkey with the intention of building a powerful navy capable of establishing the type of dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean envisaged by the Blue Homeland doctrine;²⁷ f) the utilization of an increasingly militarized foreign policy for electoral advantage, with high-profile military operations taking place prior to elections in Turkey with the explicit purpose of dividing and browbeating the Opposition.

Woven together, these diverse strands place Turkey firmly within the taxonomy of revisionist ex-imperial powers seeking to assert themselves in their neighbourhoods and, by doing so, challenge what they see as post-imperial settlements imposed by hostile Western powers.

²² D. Cenciotti, F16s, KC-135Rs, A400s: known and unknown details about the night of the Turkey military coup, *Military Aviation*, 18.7.2016.

²³ T. Karako, Coup proofing? Making sense of Turkey's S-400 Decision, Centre for International and Strategic Studies, 28.4.22 and M. Benitez and A. Stein, The post-coup purge of Turkey's Air Force, *War on the Rocks*, 19.9.2016.

²⁴ See, H. Zengin, Instrumentalising the army before elections in Turkey, *Third World Quarterly*, 2023 and S. Adar, Understanding Turkey's Increasingly Militaristic Foreign Policy, APSA MENA Politics Newsletter, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2020.

²⁵ See, H. Tas, The New Turkey and its nascent security regime, *German Institute for Global and Area Studies*, Number 6, 2020.

²⁶ See, C. Kasapoglu, Turkey's burgeoning defense technological industrial base and expeditionary military policy, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 115-130, 2020.

²⁷ S. Adar and N. T. Yasar, Rethinking civil-military relations in Turkey – How has the security landscape changed under AKP rule?, *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, No 55, November 2023,

This blatant instrumentalizing of TAF for electoral purposes was facilitated by President's Erdogan emasculation of the General Staff and his power of appointment over Armed Forces commanders.

In the case of Turkey, and under the moniker of the 'Second War of Independence', this project is inextricably linked to President Erdogan's attempts to legitimise and consolidate his rule by comparing himself with the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, not least by seeking to revisit the territorial and other settlements reached by Atatürk which, though attained after the victorious war against the Greeks, were nonetheless reached by a successor state to the Ottoman Empire hemmed in by still-powerful Western empires²⁸.

It is important to note that these developments were both facilitated by the post-2016-coup measures and constituted coup-proofing measures in their own right. This blatant instrumentalizing of TAF for electoral purposes was facilitated by President's Erdogan emasculation of the General Staff and his power of appointment over Armed Forces commanders. That an ex-commander of the Second Army, which operated in Syria, openly sided with President Erdogan in the 2018 elections sheds the clearest possible light on the politicization of TAF operations²⁹. TAFs' engagement in a variety of conflicts has afforded ambitious commanders the opportunity to improve their promotion prospects, prove themselves on the battlefield, evolve as professionals, and increase their income³⁰. Turkey asserting itself over post-Ottoman spaces appealed to the nationalism of the TAF officer corps, as well as to influential political constituencies in sync with this strand of officer corps ideology. Linking the Turkish defence sector with such expansive regional aims instilled collective pride in significant sections of the Turkish population³¹, appealing to the need for national autonomy internalized by a number of humiliating national experiences, ranging from the military defeats of a technologically backward Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries to a succession of US and Western European weapons embargoes imposed in the post-WWII period. Such embargoes have recurred, imposed first by the US after the 1974 invasion of Cyprus, then by various Western European countries, which restricted weapon sales to Turkey due to its suppression of the Kurds, and finally Turkey's above-mentioned ejection from the F35 programme and the freezing of the Turkish F16 fleet upgrade up until the Turkish Parliament's very recent quid pro quo approval of Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO.

Impact of coup proofing on TAF

Generally speaking, the publicly available analyses to which the author has access do not delve deeply into the specifics of the impact which President's Erdogan's coup-proofing measures have had on the battlefield effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces—though, as mentioned above, non-Turkish analysts were quick to speculate on this impact³². Turkish political scientists with expertise in civil-military relations in their country understandably focus on the bearing that this latest distinct phase in relations between the civilian and military authorities has had on Turkey's evolution as a polity. A minority with a military background are keen to highlight the negative impact that coup proofing has had on the combat effectiveness of TAF, but without really going into such specifics as may be known to them. In this section, we will identify the particulars which have been identified by this

²⁸ See J. Mankof, The war in Ukraine and Eurasia's new imperial moment, *The Washington Quarterly*, 2022, R. Gingeras, The Turkish Navy in an era of great power competition, *War on the Rocks*, 30.4. 2019, L. Oztic and M. A. Okur, Border Settlement Dynamics and Border Status Quo: a comparative analysis of Turkey's borders, *Geopolitics*, 2022.

²⁹ See, O. Ozkan, Don't turn the Turkish Army into a political tool, *Foreign Policy*, 20.6.2018.

³⁰ M. Ulgul and S. Demir, Keeping the soldiers at bay: coup proofing strategies in Turkey, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXVII, No3, Fall 2020.

³¹ See, D. Soyaltin-Colella and T. Demiryol, Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime boosting effects, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 44, pp. 724-743, 2023.

³² For a, early speculative attempt on the impact specifics of coup proofing on the Turkish Armed Forces see, D. Orbach, What co up-proofing will do to Turkey's military: lessons from five countries, *War on the Rocks*, 7.9.2016.

diverse cohort of scholars and analysts, but also engage in speculation, when facts are scarce in the ground, based on both the coup-proofing literature and particular features of the Turkish civil-military landscape.

...the purges have benefited anti-Western and opportunist 'tribes' within the TAF officer corps.

As cited above, diverse sources and analyses, both Turkish and non-Turkish, have reached the same conclusions with regard to the disproportionate purges of officers with a NATO background and a reputation of pro-Atlanticism resulting from President Erdogan's firm belief that the US was involved in the 2016 coup³³. Particular mention is made of the fact that the officers purged were prominent in various ongoing projects to transform TAF³⁴. It is also implied that the purges have benefited anti-Western and opportunist 'tribes' within the TAF officer corps, many of whom may also be lacking in technical sophistication and professionalism due to these attributes³⁵. Essentially, the purges have resulted in TAF losing some, if not most, of their higher-ranking officers with the drive and mindset necessary for ambitious armed forces reform. Assuming that their replacements in NATO and other critical postings were chosen for their regime loyalty and demonstrated suspicion of the US and the West at large, we may hypothesize that, in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt, TAF have become structurally handicapped when it comes to benefiting from the transformative 'lessons learned' exercise currently taking place within NATO in the light of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.

Considering what we also know about the rigidity and low quality of professional military education (PME) available to Turkish mid-career officers prior to the coup³⁶, in contrast to the spirit and reality of critical inquiry prevailing in the military schools attended by their counterparts in the US and other NATO member countries, we can safely conclude that advanced military education has degraded, further undermining the collective ability of TAF to act as a reflective, intelligent organization. Specifically, the abolition of all the TAFs' military schools and their reincarnation as units of a single defence university, under a civilian leader, clearly points to the prioritization of the institutionalizing of loyalty to President Erdogan over any thoughtful reform of Turkish PME. Instilling regime loyalty is undoubtedly a key post-2016-coup goal, and such loyalty cannot but translate, among PME social science instructors in particular, into mediocrity and the discouragement of critical inquiry and vigorous dialogue in the classroom among their students, whether they be officer cadets or mid-career officers destined for higher positions. In addition, officers approved for study abroad, at better quality PME institutions in the US and elsewhere in the West, would tend to be selected on regime loyalty grounds and not on exceptional performance and/or their potential for future growth as professionals.

Moving on to the individual Services, ejection from the F35 programme, as well as delays in the upgrades to the mainstay of the Air Force, the F16, means that the Turkish Air Force is falling behind NATO air forces, Greece's included, in the introduction of new capabilities in the air, along with the operational advantages these capabilities confer on the conduct of joint warfare.

³³ See, S. J. Flanagan, F.S. Larrabee, A. Binnerdijk, K. Costello, S. Efron, J. Hoobler, M. Kirchner, J. Martini, A. Nader, P. A. Wilson, Turkey's Nationalist Course- Implications for the US-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the US Army, *Rand Corporation*, 2020. M. Gurcan and M. Giscion, What is the Turkish Military's strategic identity after July 15, *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief*, September 2016 and M. Gurcan, Never again! But how? State and the military in Turkey after July 15, *Istanbul Policy Center*, April 2017.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ M. Gurcan and M. Giscion, What is the Turkish Military's strategic identity after July 15, *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief*, September 2016 and M. Gurcan, Never again! But how? State and the military in Turkey after July 15, *Istanbul Policy Center*, April 2017.

³⁶ B. Etes, Civil-Military Relations and Education of Military Elites in Turkiye: Lessons learned from the past, *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 50, Issue 1, pp. 253-273, 2024.

Importantly, the purges of Turkey's Air Force pilots were so extensive that, according to estimates, the accumulated expertise lost will still not have been replaced today, eight years after they took place³⁷. Sources within the Hellenic Air Force corroborate this estimate by pointing out that a) the Turkish Air Force reduced the missions flown by its fighter jets from a daily average of 130-150 fighter jets to 50-70 in the period 2016-2022 (2023 is not a representative year due to an agreed moratorium with Greece regarding the activity of the Turkish Air Force in the Aegean Sea air space); and b) Turkish Air Force pilots participating in missions that could easily lead to 4 vs 4 engagements with the Hellenic Air Force have often been clearly inexperienced, compared to the pre-2016 period, on occasion compensating for their lack of skill with over-aggressiveness³⁸.

Consistent with the literature on coup proofing being applied to a lesser degree on units which operate far off from the capital, as they do not represent a threat to regime survival, as well as on the role ideology and career ambition can play in protecting a regime from a coup, we must acknowledge the other side of the coup-proofing coin. The battlefield effectiveness of TAF, and of the Army in particular, must have benefited from its engagement in a variety of military conflicts, which gave it the opportunity to develop a corps of professionals, officers, NCOs and soldiers who are both battle-hardened and have demonstrated the ability to innovate on the battlefield.

This last point is inextricably linked with the prominence the Turkish defence industrial sector has achieved in fielding increasingly effectiveUCAVs. In the South East of Turkey itself, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Azerbaijan the Turkish Armed Forces have learned to integrateUCAVs, and more generally UAVs, into joint and combined operations -- as with the use of UAVs to direct land artillery fires and/or Air Force strikes against land targets, for example³⁹. While TurkishUCAVs were rapidly eclipsed by the first-person-view (FPV) drones deployed in their thousands on the Russo-Ukrainian front, we can expect that the involvement of Turkish firms--most prominently, Bayraktar--as suppliers to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (which extends to the setting up of an R&D centre in Ukraine) will allow TAF to quickly integrate the fast-evolving iteration of unmanned platforms into their own operations. That being said, it is worth underlining the limited nature of battlefield innovation taking place within TAF, given that such innovation mostly involves action against insurgents or standing armies of limited technological and operational sophistication--be it in the civil war in Libya, or in Nagorno Karabach against an Armenian Army which had stagnated both technologically and operationally. Additionally, regime loyalty also plays a role in battlefield appointments, with suboptimal results, as in the case of the Special Forces officer leading operations in Syria, despite a lack of combined arms experience, due to his pro-regime role in the 2016 coup⁴⁰.

At sea, the picture is decidedly mixed⁴¹. The embrace of an aggressive doctrine of naval-based hegemony in the East Mediterranean, a pillar of President Erdogan's political alliance with the far right and with ambitious secular naval officers, has been backed up by the manufacture of a family of frigates and corvettes of increasingly Turkish design, with all the pros and cons such a provenance may entail (among the pluses, we would count cost-effective follow-on-support and increased strategic autonomy; on the minuses, equipment which is not cutting edge technologically). This homegrown navy is in the process of being augmented by the construction under licence of advanced T214 German submarines. The

³⁷ M. Benitez and A. Stein, The post-coup purge of Turkey's Air Force, *War on the Rocks*, 19.9.2016.

³⁸ Conversation of the author with retired high-ranking Hellenic Air Force Officer.

³⁹ C. Kasapoglu, Turkey's Burgeoning defense technological industrial base and expeditionary military policy, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 115-130, 2020.

⁴⁰ G. Jenkins, Erdogan's generals: From military tutelage to a politicized military, *Middle East Institute*, 26.10.2018.

⁴¹ See R. Gingeras, The Turkish Navy in an era of great power competition, *War on the Rocks*, 30.4. 2019 and R. Gingeras, Blue Homeland: The heated politics behind Turkey's new maritime strategy, *War on the Rocks*, 2.6.2020.

acquisition of two Spanish aircraft carriers has, however, been devalued by the fact the F35s that were designated for these two carriers are no longer available and have been replaced by Turkish-manufactured UCAVs, which is clearly a suboptimal choice.

Of high relevance to Greece is the possibility that the leadership of the Istanbul-based 1st Army Corps of the Turkish Army has been compromised by coup-proofing concerns, either through the choice of mediocre regime loyalists and/or the composition of a Corps staff riven by suspicion, with individuals reporting to the civilian authorities on the loyalties of their fellow staff officers.

Of high relevance to Greece is the possibility that the leadership of the Istanbul-based 1st Army Corps of the Turkish Army has been compromised by coup-proofing concerns, either through the choice of mediocre regime loyalists and/or the composition of a Corps staff riven by suspicion, with individuals reporting to the civilian authorities on the loyalties of their fellow staff officers. The 1st Army Corps is responsible for the forces deployed in European Turkey, which is to say the only land border Turkey shares with Greece, and has the Greek Army's best-equipped armour formations, the 4th Army Corps, deployed opposite it. Due to its status as the ex-imperial capital, Istanbul is in fact the largest city in Turkey as well as its economic and media centre. The city represents a focal point for any coup plotter, together with the capital Ankara, of course--a fact demonstrated by the involvement of 1st Army Corps units in the 2016 coup.

Indicatively, the Balyoz prosecution included a scenario in which a manufactured military crisis with Greece provided the cover for a coup. In any scenario involving inter-state conflict with Greece, given that coup-proofing analysis is pertinent with regard to the 1st Army Corps, we would expect the 1st Army Corps to suffer from underwhelming leadership and, possibly, delayed authorization for manoeuvres and coordinated action in the context of joint operations, due to fears that such manoeuvres could actually be masking a coup attempt.

More generally, we would expect the Turkish Armed Forces to suffer from coordination problems due to--as per the literature--the regime's suspicion of unhindered higher officer interaction and officers' need to prove their regime loyalty by pointing out instances of regime disloyalty on the part of their fellow officers. Greek sources have also corroborated this state of affairs, with reports that each Turkish Air Force unit contains specially-designated officers and NCOs charged with reporting any activities on the part of the unit's officers that seems suspicious from a regime loyalty point of view⁴². We would expect a prevailing atmosphere of this sort both to restrict and compromise the quality of officer-to-officer interaction, and thus ultimately to limit the officer corps' ability to plan and execute a major operation of the sort inter-state conflict with Greece would necessitate⁴³.

...we would expect the Turkish Armed Forces to suffer from coordination problems due to--as per the literature--the regime's suspicion of unhindered higher officer interaction

Turning to Turkey's intelligence service (MIT), its transformation into an instrument of regime preservation has meant a focus on identifying enemies of the regime, particularly within the Armed Forces. This mission could have had several negative implications for the effectiveness of TAF. First, the need to prove its mettle as a regime protector could have had incentivised MIT to manufacture regime disloyalty when none actually exists, either destroying the careers of competent officers or discourage the articulation of professional judgements which run counter to regime preferences, lest such an articulation is seen as sign of disloyalty. This could have had instilled a spirit of conformism within the Armed Forces. Second, scarce intelligence resources would tend to be dedicated to regime protection rather than to assessing the external environment, thereby undermining the quality of the analysis shaping key foreign policy decisions by President Erdogan and his team. Third, critical information might not circulate effectively between MIT and TAF, due to the adversarial relations that have been institutionalized between the two of them. Fourth, its status as a regime protector could mean that MIT would tend to conflate its world view with that of President Erdogan and thus may be incapable of diverging with his judgement on issues of war and peace, the addressing of which are core to the President's own strategy of

⁴²Conversation between the author and a retired high-ranking Hellenic Air Force Officer.

⁴³ See, Bipartisan Policy Center, *Deep state of crisis: Reassessing risks to the Turkish state*, March 2017

domestic political hegemony as much as his vision of Turkey's international status and trajectory.

In the light of the above, the most critical conclusion we can reach is that the battlefield innovation and experience gained by TAF in theatres of secondary importance, with the aid of innovative but limited equipment produced by the Turkish defence technological industrial base, cannot compensate for the widening gap between TAF and its NATO peer armed forces. TAF today has lost a critical mass of officers who could transfer and intelligently adapt NATO-level knowhow to TAFs' operations and doctrines. It has either been denied critical upgrades to its Air Force fleet, or had those upgrades delayed, which has both led to the stagnation of its Air Force and negatively impacted the evolution of its overall joint operations. And, perhaps most critically of all, TAF now suffers from a toxic post-coup organizational environment of suspicion and favouritism, which is simply incompatible with a highly complex and ambitious multiyear transformational modernization effort in a period in which the Russo-Ukrainian war has made transformative modernization a must for battlefield-effective Armed Forces worldwide.

...the coup-proofing measures that are integral to his rule have placed severe structural constraints on his ability to threaten Greece militarily.

Erdogan's Coup proofing and Greece's national security

Notwithstanding the recent thaw in bilateral relationship, the forces that are pushing Turkey's President--or his epigones, should he hand over power to them before he is defeated by the Opposition in the next electoral contest--to up the ante with Greece should not be discounted. At the same time, however, the coup-proofing measures that are integral to his rule have placed severe structural constraints on his ability to threaten Greece militarily.

President Erdogan has no choice but to revert to economic orthodoxy, a policy path that can only add to the recent loss of support his party suffered in the local government elections of March 2024⁴⁴. The Opposition, with its support firming up due to the enduring economic distress being suffered by the Turkish people, is becoming increasingly capable of nullifying the advantage that President Erdogan has derived from his militarized foreign policy. Economic distress is also fuelling the meaningful addition to the Opposition forces of an empowered Islamic right, with the son of the late Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Yeniden Rafah party Fatih Erbakan, increasingly able to challenge President Erdogan on social equity grounds and on foreign policy – since he is also a beneficiary of the legacy of the successful military invasion of Cyprus in 1974, as his father was part of the government alliance led by the CHP under Bulent Ecevit. For all his talk about a Second War of Independence, President Erdogan has yet to register an emphatic diplomatic or military victory that would put him on the same pedestal as Kemal Ataturk; and let us not forget that, as a CHP politician, his leading rival Ekrem Imamoglu, Mayor of Istanbul, shares in the legacy of both the Graeco-Turkish war of 1918-1922 and the 1974 invasion of Cyprus.

For all his talk about a Second War of Independence, President Erdogan has yet to register an emphatic diplomatic or military victory.

President Erdogan has obviously taken on board the lessons of successful coups in Turkey's past associated with and induced by economic instability, and has sought to reverse the decline of the Turkish economy, by appointing an economic team respected for its orthodoxy and professionalism by international markets⁴⁵. Doing so has, however, increased the

⁴⁴ For an analyses of the March 2024 local election results and their domestic and international implications, see S. Cevik, Local Elections show Turkey's democratic resilience, *Arab Center Washington DC*, 2.5.2024 and M. Pierini, How the EU and NATO should view Turkey's surprising election results, *Carnegie Endowment*, 1.4.2024.

⁴⁵ Astute Turkish scholars have identified, on the basis of both past Turkish history and international evidence regarding populism and economic decline, how Turkey's economic performance could threaten President Erdogan's regime. See respectively, S. Demir and O. Bingol, From military

probability, of President Erdogan stabilizing the Turkish economy only to hand the reins of the Turkish polity over to his political opponents – an unappetizing prospect to say the least, considering his messianic complex and the threat the loss of power represents to him, his family and the business and other interests vested in the perpetuation of the Erdogan regime, either by himself or by an anointed successor. So, President Erdogan either gets the economy into shape and, for all intents and purposes, hands over the reins to his civilian opponents, or reverts to his economic populism and risks the type of upheaval that could well legitimate and instigate yet another military coup against him.

The only 'get out of jail card' in sight for President Erdogan is a military operation launched against Greece with the aim of establishing Turkey's dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean and resulting in the unambiguous defeat of the Greek Armed Forces.

Military action against Greece would suffer from the lack of advanced weapon platforms denied to Turkey due to its distancing itself from the West.

However, as we intimated above, President Erdogan's own coup-proofing measures have, vis-a-vis Greece, rendered even more inapplicable his playbook of instrumentalizing TAF prior to election contests in order to divide the Opposition and consolidate the national vote, as he did by means of the military operations he ordered in Syria prior to the electoral contests of 2015, 2017 and 2018⁴⁶. Needless to say, Greece is utterly unlike Syria in terms of its international legitimacy and inclusion in and active membership of a Western security system recently rejuvenated by the Russo-Ukrainian war. Integral to this Greek international identity is the possession of Armed Forces which are in a position to take advantage of the damage inflicted on TAF by President Erdogan's coup-proofing measures. Relatedly, we would highlight:

- The inability of the Turkish military to scale its effort effectively in a potential military encounter with Greece, due to the coup-proofing-induced fragmentation, lack of trust and weakened camaraderie prevailing among TAFs' higher ranks.
- Military action against Greece would suffer from the lack of advanced weapon platforms denied to Turkey due to its distancing itself from the West and, its converse corollary, from military assistance to Greece provided by its geopolitical allies at a time when Greece has become exceptionally aligned with both the US and leading EU member-states. Exhibit A for this effect is the multiyear delay imposed on the modernization of Turkey's Air Force, while Greece has been able to acquire highly advanced Rafale fighter jets, to press ahead unhindered with the modernization of its F16 fleet to the Viper configuration, and to place orders for 5th-generation F35 aircraft⁴⁷. We reiterate here that the Turkish Air Force has suffered a dual coup-proofing blow in the form of the massive purge of its pilots and the impact of the S400 acquisition on its fleet modernization programme.
- In a military conflict with Greece, TAF would also be incapable of deploying a coherent body of doctrine assimilated through a 'lessons learned' process instigated in the context of Turkey's NATO membership and key military-to-military relations--relations that have suffered due to President Erdogan's mistrust of the US and those TAF officers who are most NATO-oriented, operationally and philosophically. This constraint on TAFs' ability to benefit from 'lessons learned' is most salient in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war, but not restricted to it. We highlight here that Turkey has not joined the US Navy (USN) in its operations against the Houthis in the Red Sea

tutelage to civilian control: an analysis of the evolution of Turkish civil- military relations, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47, No 2, pp. 172-191. 2020, and H. Tas, Populism and civil-military relations, *Democratization*, Vol. 31, No 1, pp. 70-89, 2024.

⁴⁶ H. Zengin, Instrumentalising the army before elections in Turkey, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 45, Issue 3, pp. 445-457, 2024.

⁴⁷ For a recent update on the Hellenic Air Force's qualitative superiority over the Turkish Air Force see, P. Iddon, Why U.S. approved Greek F35 and Turkish F16 sales simultaneously, *Forbes*, 5.2.2014.

while the Hellenic Navy has been gaining critical combat experience in the EU Operation ASPIDES, which is complementary to the USN effort in the area⁴⁸.

To further illuminate the aforementioned constrains, it would be useful to compare and contrast a hypothesized military conflict between Turkey and Greece with the 1974 invasion of Cyprus by Turkey--a complex amphibious operation which, despite several operational mishaps, ended in military success for TAF.

In the years preceding the Cyprus invasion and following the coup against Prime Minister Menderes in 1960, the Turkish military hierarchy had managed to strengthen the authority of the General Staff vis-a-vis the civilian leadership, not least so that it could discourage factionalism within the officer corps encouraged by the free for all as various officer factions usurped civilian power for a variety of ideological and professional reasons. Henceforth, only the General Staff, led by an all-powerful Chief, would decide when and how the army would intervene in domestic politics⁴⁹. To be sure, the lack of civilian supremacy, coupled with career and generational fault lines within TAF, and Turkey's own history, geography and developmental trajectory, continued to generate factionalism in the 1960s, anchored either in different perceptions of the state's role in development, and/or in pro- or anti-Western orientations⁵⁰. Still, the upper echelons of TAF, anchored in the person of the Chief of the General Staff and the Service Chiefs of the General Staff, could put a lid on this cauldron, having institutionalized their praetorian function over the political system through the creation of the National Security Council, the embodiment to their subordinates of TAFs' ability to impose its will on the politicians, and thus its competence to represent their corporate interests and worldviews satisfactorily⁵¹.

In retrospect, the recurrent eruptions of inter-communal conflict in Cyprus, which engaged both Turkey and Greece politically and militarily in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the UK and the US, gave TAF the time it needed to become operationally capable of launching an invasion of the island⁵². TAF was able first to recognize that it was unprepared to intervene in the island and thus impose Turkish interests, and second to undertake the multiyear effort to build its operational capacity to invade the island.

So all together, and considering the saliency of the Cyprus issue across the Turkish polity and society, a reasonably cohesive Turkish military leadership was able over time to develop an amphibious plus expeditionary capacity by procuring locally-manufactured landing craft or purchasing second-hand ones on international markets; to create specially-designated marine and paratroop units; and to conduct suitable exercises. Concurrently, and considering the acuity of the Cold War crisis, this modernization effort was also complemented by TAFs' participation in various complex and sophisticated NATO military exercises⁵³.

So, in contrast to the 2010s and 2020s, we see a reasonably stable and cohesive officer corps able to prepare for a particular operational challenge years in advance--not least,

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⁴⁸ See, relatedly, D. Mitropoulos, Centaur: The new combat-proven C-UAS system by Hellenic Aerospace Industry, Naval news, 7.18.2024.

⁴⁹ See for this period, and for the role of the Chief of the General Staff, G. Bacik and S. Salur, Coup proofing in Turkey, *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, (2), 2010 and S. Waldman and E. Caliskan, Factional and Unprofessional: Turkey's military and the July 2016 attempted coup, *Democracy and Security*, 2019, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pp. 123-150, 2020.

⁵⁰ See, G. Bacik and S. Salur, Coup-proofing in Turkey, *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pp. 163-188, 2010.

⁵¹ See, B. Esen, Praetorian Army in Action: A critical assessment of civil-military relations in Turkey, *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 47, Issue 1, pp. 201-222, 2021

⁵² For a periodicity of the Cyprus issue leading up to the invasion, see F. D. Adamson, Democratization and the Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus crisis, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 116, Number 2, 2001.

⁵³ See, S. Guvenc and M. Uyar, Against all odds--Turkish Amphibious operations in Cyprus, 20-23, July 1974 in T. Heck and B.A. Friedman, *On Contested Shores: The Evolving Role of Amphibious Operations in the History of Warfare*, 2020, Marine Corps University Press, and E. J. Erickson and M. Uyar, *Phase Line Attila – The Amphibious campaign for Cyprus, 1974*, Marine Corps University Press, 2020.

presumably, by assigning this task to competent officers who were able to collaborate effectively together. While the invasion of Cyprus has also been analyzed in regime consolidation terms, as an effort to promote the stability of the Turkish political system in a period when rapid urbanization and industrialization was engendering sociopolitical radicalization and polarization⁵⁴, at the same it enjoyed mass--indeed, nearly unanimous—support, and was not tied to a particular political leader and an officer faction which had bound its fates to his. This meant, as we point out above, that as an operational challenge it was the property of the totality of the officer corps, who were, moreover, able at the time to benefit from a close relationship with NATO and all this relationship entailed in terms of the transfer of crucial knowhow to TAF.

Today, a fragmented and mistrustful officer corps shorn of some of its most talented members and restricted in its ability to learn from NATO is inherently less capable of planning and executing a military operation against Greece. Its leadership has tied its fortunes to the current civilian leadership.⁵⁵ which in turn enjoys nothing close to unanimous civilian support. As importantly, as we pointed out above, and in sharp contrast to 1974, Greece is currently exceptionally integrated in the Western security system,⁵⁶ and none of its disputes with Turkey can be accepted by this security system as justifying the use of armed force by Turkey. Concurrently, and precisely due to this integration, the Greek Armed Forces enjoy an advantage over the Turkish Armed Forces, which continues to increase with the passage of time, both in the availability to them of cutting-edge weapon systems and in their ability to absorb superior operational practices emanating from that system.

The comparison between 1974 and the present cannot but lead us to conclude that only a disastrous error of judgement could lead Turkey to engage in the type of military conflict with Greece that could restore President Erdogan's domestic hegemony and/or pass on this hegemony to his epigones.

The comparison between 1974 and the present cannot but lead us to conclude that only a disastrous error of judgement could lead Turkey to engage in the type of military conflict with Greece that could restore President Erdogan's domestic hegemony and/or pass on this hegemony to his epigones.

Such an error of judgement would involve, first, a category mistake, by which we mean that Turkey's civilian leadership would assume the TAF could convert the operational knowhow and technological innovation it has developed in its various unilateral military operations against subpar state and non-state opponents in such theatres as Syria and Libya into the military intimidation of, or victory over, Greece. Second, this error of judgement would also incorporate the on-going, complete subordination of the AKP to President Erdogan's leadership, with key founding members either retiring from politics or joining the Opposition benches, replaced by personalities connected to the President either by blood or by their utter loyalty to and dependence on him. Thus, within Turkey's ruling circles, there will be no meaningful debate on the wisdom of such a move, but rather a compounding of regime biases due to the incentives for doing so being identical with the perpetuation of President Erdogan's dominance⁵⁷. Third, this error of judgement would be facilitated by a General Staff which is completely subordinate to President Erdogan's rule and thus incapable of raising objections to such a desperate gambit, notwithstanding any reservations its members may hold privately. Individual commanders, handpicked by President Erdogan himself, may also be keen to endorse or even propose such a move against Greece in an attempt to further

⁵⁴ F. B. Adamson, Democratization and the Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus crisis, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 116, No2, pp. 277-303, 2001.

⁵⁵ For this transition to a personal relationship between high-ranking commanders and President Erdogan, see G. Jenkins, Erdogan's generals: from military tutelage to a politicized military, *The Middle East Institute*, 26.10.2018 and H. Salin, Turkey's play with its military: civil-military relations before and after the 2016 coup, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, March 2019.

⁵⁶ Turkey's post-2016 antagonistic relationship with the US has produced a notable shift in US policy with regard to the managing of Greek-Turkish frictions, see indicatively, R. Gingeras, An honest broker no longer: the United States between Turkey and Greece, *War on the Rocks*, 3.1.2023.

⁵⁷ S. Ozturk and T. Reilly, Assessing centralization: on Turkey's rising personalist regime, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 167-185, 2024.

their career ambitions and curry favour with him. Fourth, MIT, as an instrument completely under President Erdogan's control and entrusted with the protection and perpetuation of his rule, would also tend to play an influential role in the Presidential echo chamber, should the Greek option ever be seriously entertained.

Taking everything into account, we would argue that never since 1974 have both the geopolitical conditions and the state of the respective Greek and Turkish Armed Forces – in other words, the objective structural conditions -- been so unpropitious for Turkey to risk military conflict with Greece to advance its objectives, whether they be defined in national or regime-survival terms. That being said, this risk cannot be relegated to the realm of the fantastic, due to the very nature of President Erdogan's regime, including regime features engendered by the post-2016 coup-proofing measures.

Concluding thoughts: So why should Greece care?

Coup proofing has been shown to massively undermine the battlefield effectiveness of most armed forces that have been subjected to it, through its effects on officer promotions, military training, coordination between units, and information management. In some notable cases, however, certain coup-proofing measures have either been shunned by regimes fearing a coup, or others specifically chosen so as to not undermine the battlefield effectiveness which the regime prizes so highly.

TAF have indubitably suffered massively as a result of President Erdogan's post-2016 coup-proofing measures, particularly in terms of the quality of its officer corps and its ability to work together collegially for the sake of the effectiveness of their Services and formations. President Erdogan's coup proofing has meant limiting the inflows into TAF of superior expertise of NATO provenance which inheres in officer training and education and in the inextricable link between this training and expertise and globally outperforming weapon systems. On the positive side from the point of view of TAFs' battlefield effectiveness, but in no way compensating for its disastrous effects, President Erdogan has integrated coup proofing into a unilateral militarized foreign policy and indigenous defence technological industrial base, enabling TAF to innovate in secondary theatres against non-peer opponents.

Considering the above, it is incumbent on Greek policy makers to deploy, in their analyses of TAF, the analytical toolkit provided by the coup-proofing literature, as it has developed internationally as much as in the Turkish case. The Greek Ministry of Defence, the Greek National Intelligence Agency and the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be able to leverage their ongoing intelligence gathering and analyses efforts by connecting them to the coup-proofing analytical canon, deepening their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Turkish Armed Forces and of civil-military dynamics in Turkey. In this author's estimation, coup proofing in Turkey matters both because coup-proofing measures post-2016 have increased the structural constraints on Turkey undertaking military action against Greece manifold, and because they have not eliminated altogether the possibility of such military action taking place.