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BOOK REVIEW

***Murat BELGE, Militarist Modernization:
Germany, Japan and Turkey***

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Militarist Modernization: Germany, Japan and Turkey

Murat BELGE

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Though militarism has been considered as the dominant ideology of the modern nation-state apparatus in the 19th and early 20th centuries during which many state- and nation-building processes were continuing, one can argue that even 21st century national and international politics are not immune from militarist approaches. Though some countries in the Western world are believed to have reached to the age of post-Westphalian era; many others, for the apparent stake of internal and external threat perceptions, do still give importance to the deterrence potential of their military.

The book by Murat Belge, first of all, analyses the militarist ideology at the conceptual level and looks at its main goals and instruments. Then it examines various case studies, mainly the examples of Japan, Germany and Turkey, though political history of some other selected countries is also taken into account in order to understand the historical development of militarist approach.

In the historical development of the militarist ideology since the French Revolution, first of all, its connection with nationalism should be accounted for. The sacredness of the French nation and its culture was the main factor that fueled the rise of French military as a result of which European great powers have come together to challenge the rising revolutionary power at the heart of Europe. The idea of nationalism is based on the belief that nation is something sacred for which all citizens should be ready to die whenever it is deemed necessary by decision-makers. The nation representing something eternal legitimizes every kind of sacrifice, including martyrdom. Hence, the trio of state-nation-homeland is one of the requirements of the militarist ideology (p. 157). Whenever and wherever this combination is a natural part of the daily jargon of the political life, one should be careful to face the danger of militarism.

Another important pillar of militarism is the belief that one's own nation has been subjected to injustice throughout history, in other words, the idea of being victimized is used as a legitimation to not only build up huge armies, but also to establish the dominance of military institutions. This point is clearly visible in the Turkish and German cases. Being the target of European colonial empires in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the legacy of the Ottoman Empire left a deep wound in the mental

map of the Republican leaders, its traces still visible. On the other hand, the Treaty of Versailles led to a similar result in the German case. The Weimar Republic of the interwar era had a difficulty to cope with the terrible results of the Treaty.

In addition, the third pillar is the exaggeration of one's own might as seen in all three case studies. The fact that Hitler's expansionism did not stop before the Polish line though the Western world was ready to appease to a certain extent has been an example how a leadership cadre can believe that it can achieve the maximum if it has a supreme military potential. Leaders of historical Japan, offering a similar case, were also of the opinion that they could establish their hegemony in Asia and their lust for ever more power led to a disaster in the end.

Turkey, setting another example, has been full of discourses of military victories and also of the power of "Turk", as seen in the dictum that a Turk is equal to the whole world.

Irrespective of the place and the time the militarist ideology often uses certain instruments in order to ascertain its supremacy throughout the whole country: First of all, it enters into every area of human life, including education, sports, arts etc. For example, in the early days of the 12 September 1980 *coup d'etat* in Turkey, successes of the War Academy in sports were broadcast at the official TV channel, TRT. Another striking example was seen in the German case since scouting became popular at German schools following the early examples in Britain. Another instrument is the attempt to show the case of death for the national interests of the country as something sacred.

Each case covered in the volume is unique on the one hand, but they also have similarities on the other. One commonality in all three cases is that all of these three countries are poor in terms of natural resources, this being one of the main reasons to explain the expansionist ideology behind the idea of militarism. Another parallel is that in all three cases there were the cases of major military defeats. But, one important difference is that although both Berlin and Tokyo could defeat their militarist legacy successfully in the post-Second World War era, Turkey lagged behind, and still has a problem to overcome the residuals of that legacy.

The fact that young Turkish Republic has been established as a result of a series of wars and the founding fathers stemmed from the Ottoman military could explain why the military retained its importance in the 1920's and 1930's. But the striking point was that it continued to be so even after the Second World War ended. The emergence of the Cold War was of course one of the primary factors, but without taking into account the survival of the Prussian militarist legacy in the Turkish security understanding, it cannot be possible to grasp the salience of militarism. The program called "Military Hour" (*Ordu Saati*) published in the Turkish radio was full of references to the attempt of normalization of the military understanding. In that program one striking point was that there was often an attempt to draw a realist picture of the international system and then legitimize the military's might. The following quotations are a good example of how the world was characterized as Hobbesian state of nature: "War is a must... There is a war in the world and there will be war... In every place nation means military... Turkish nation is a military." (*Ordu Saati*, 1956, p. 697).

The book is an important contribution to the literature on comparative studies on militarist modernization. Based on an extensive research of the three case studies it looks at how and why the military institutions prevailed in these countries. One important problem with the book is that in some chapters it dwells so much on political history that its focus is lost.

In the conclusion the author asks an important question and leaves it blank. He argues that in Turkey so far “Kemalist nationalist ideology” has proceeded with military approach that is loaded with elitism and positivism. The fact that under the reign of the Justice and Development Party, civil-military relationship has been reordered to the benefit of the civilians, does not overlook the fact that Turkish democracy still needs consolidation. The recent years have led to the argument that the establishment of the supremacy of civilian structures in Turkey would not mean institutionalization of democracy per se. Murat Belge argues for the possibility that militarist ideology of the previous years can be replaced by a kind of religious militarism.