

Replacing old Big Brother with a new one is not democratization!

Monday 17 March 2008, by [Orhan Kemal Cengiz](#)

Turgut Özal was one of the most pragmatic leaders Turkey has ever seen. He had a rich imagination and wide horizons and was very flexible. The image of him inspecting an army regiment wearing shorts, while soldiers stood at attention, fully armed, is one of the unforgettable pictures that he has left us.

Özal was trying to break down some stereotypes in Turkey, and one of his efforts was to put the army under civilian authority. He was trying to develop new tactics to tackle the power of the military. There were rumors; some people thought Özal was preparing police forces to resist in case of a coup d'état by the military. We are not in a position to find out if this indeed crossed Özal's mind. However, one thing is certain: That he was trying to reinforce police forces to create a counter force against military power or, at least, he was trying strike a new balance in these power relations.

Cops versus soldiers ?

After he held the offices of prime minister and president, some other successive governments also gave some credit to this idea. It is no secret that there has been a power competition between the army and the police forces for quite some time. This power struggle shows itself in different forms and it even happens sometimes within the same institution. The National Intelligence Organization (MIT) had been directed by soldiers since it was first established. Starting in Özal's era, a "civilian" undersecretary has been appointed to this institution and it was no secret that there were wings composed of "civilians" and "military oriented" personnel in the MIT.

This power struggle also presents itself in "intelligence" wars. Every institution has its own intelligence gathering and processing mechanisms and channels. They also watch each other's activities. In other words, there has been a covert ongoing war within and among institutions.

These wars and their parties may occasionally create a kind of illusion to them and their supporters, or at least lead us into a confusion in which we may misinterpret the situation of the positions of these particular actors.

The military in Turkey, as I have already indicated on many different occasions in this column, has an abnormal role in the political system and within state structures. Most of the time, democrats and liberals criticize the military and its role in democratization in Turkey and for furthering the European integration process. Recently, though, I have started to observe some actors who hide behind this shield and criticize the military and its actions, arguing that its actions are against this and that.

However, when you pay close attention, you observe that the very same people may not be equally sensitive to human rights violations or breaching legal rules and regulations when it comes to the police and its actions. Then you gradually realize that their opposition to the army does not come from their well-rooted democratic attitudes but instead from positioning themselves in this power struggle. I find this very dangerous.

The 'Big Ear' affair

In the last couple of weeks, some people or circles have been broadcasting some “private conversations” of some “officials” on YouTube. So far, the former president of the Higher Education Board (YÖK), Ankara public prosecutor and a brigadier general have been among the “victims.” Their conversations were apparently recorded by some kind of listening devices and are being posted on YouTube. In these conversations, these people, unaware of this recording, are criticizing the government; one of them is swearing at the prime minister, the other one praising the army’s role, etc. These conversations may even include some criminal elements.

It is obvious that some sources with the power and capacity to do this are monitoring many people without authorization from the courts, and when they come across “nasty” remarks they simply disclose them. In my opinion, we are witnessing another episode in the war between the army and the police. This war is not capable of bringing more democracy and more freedom onto this territory. It is a dirty war; its only promise is to introduce us a new “big brother,” from which we should refrain at all costs!

Sources

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