

Q. Critically evaluate the role of military in Turkish politics

Ans:

1. Introduction

The role of the military in Turkish politics has been a significant and contentious issue throughout the country's history. Turkey has experienced multiple military interventions and coup attempts, indicating the military's influence and involvement in politics. To critically evaluate their role, it is essential to consider both historical and contemporary perspectives.

2. Historical Intervention

The Turkish military has intervened in politics multiple times, justifying its actions as safeguarding the principles of *Kemalism*, the secular and nationalist ideology established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. These interventions have included coup d'états, political pressure, and suspension of democratic processes. While it is argued that the military's interventions have aimed to protect the secular nature of the state, but at the same time, they have also undermined democratic governance and civil liberties.

3. Secularism and Guardianship

The military has historically positioned itself as the guardian of secularism in Turkey. This self-perceived role stems from Atatürk's vision of a secular state.

The military has seen its duty as protecting the secular order against perceived threats, such as Islamist influences. This has resulted in the military exerting significant influence over politics and society, and has created a tension between secularist and religious factions.

4. National Security Council (NSC)

The Turkish military has had a prominent role within the National Security Council, a key decision-making body responsible for national security and defense policies. The NSC traditionally included military leaders and played a significant role in shaping policies. However, recent reforms have reduced the military's presence in the council, aiming to increase civilian control and limit the military's influence.

5. Civil-Military Relations

Turkey has experienced a power struggle between the civilian government and the military. The military has historically considered itself as the guardian of Turkey's secular identity and has intervened in politics when it perceived threats to this identity. However, the AKP government, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has implemented reforms aimed at

reducing the military's political influence and increasing civilian control over the armed forces.

6. Coup attempts and the 2016 failed coup

The Turkish military has intervened in politics on multiple occasions throughout the country's history. These interventions, commonly known as "coups", have aimed to remove governments perceived as threatening the secular and Kemalist principles. The military has justified its interventions as necessary to maintain stability, uphold the constitution, and prevent the rise of Islamist or anti-secular forces.

a. 1960 Coup

The military's first intervention in Turkish politics occurred in 1960, resulting in the overthrow of the government and the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes. This coup established a pattern of military interventions in Turkish politics.

b. 1971 New Order

In 1971, the military issued a new order, which forced the government to resign. While this intervention was bloodless, it resulted in a period of political instability and paved the way for subsequent interventions.

c. 1980 coup

The most significant military intervention took place in 1980, following a period of political violence and economic instability. The military seized power and ruled

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The country under martial law for three years. The 1980 coup brought about a series of political and social changes, including a new constitution and the suppression of political parties.

d, 1997 "Postmodern Coup"

In 1997, the military exerted pressure on the government through a series of military-backed statements, leading to the resignation of the prime minister. This intervention, often referred to as the "postmodern" coup, did not involve direct military rule but showed the military's influence in Turkish politics.

e, 2016 Failed Coup

In July 2016, a faction within the Turkish military attempted a coup to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government. The coup plotters claimed to be acting against Erdoğan's perceived authoritarianism and erosion of secularism. They occupied key institutions and deployed military forces in major cities.

However, the coup attempt was met with resistance. Erdoğan addressed the nation through a video message, urging citizens to resist the coup and take to the streets.

Thousands of people responded, leading to confrontations between coup plotters and civilians. Loyalist elements within the military, police, and civilian population rallied against the coup attempt. The government declared a state of emergency and launched a massive counter-coup operation. The coup was suppressed within

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a few days, and Erdogan's government regained control.

1. Recent Developments

In recent years, the military's role in Turkish politics has undergone significant transformation under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP).

a. Democratization Efforts

Erdogan's government has made efforts to curtail the military's influence in politics and strengthen civilian control. This included constitutional amendments and legal reforms aimed at reducing the military's role and increasing civilian oversight.

b. Crackdown on the Military

In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in 2016, Erdogan initiated a massive purge of suspected coup plotters within the military. Thousands of military personnel were dismissed, and key positions were filled with loyalists, thereby consolidating Erdogan's control over the armed forces.

c. Erdogan's Approach

Erdogan has sought to balance the military's traditional role with his political agenda. He has emphasized the importance of a strong military but also exerted control over its decision-making processes. Erdogan has

increased military spending, expanded military operations in Syria and Iraq, and reinforced the military's presence in domestic affairs, particularly in counterterrorism efforts.

d. Restructuring of the Military

Erdogan initiated a process of restructuring the military to align it more closely with his vision. This included replacing high-ranking military officials with those loyal to the government and implementing reforms to enhance the military's efficiency and combat capabilities.

e. Increased Civilian Oversight

Erdogan has taken steps to increase civilian oversight over the military. He has asserted greater control over the National Security Council, which was historically dominated by the military, and reduced the military's representation within it. Additionally, Erdogan has strengthened the role of the Ministry of Defense in decision-making processes, further enhancing civilian control.

f. Involvement in Security and Foreign Policy

The military continues to play a significant role in Turkey's security and foreign policy decisions. It is actively involved in counterterrorism operations against Kurdish insurgent groups, particularly the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The military has also

participated in operations in neighboring Syria and Iraq, reflecting Turkey's assertive regional posture.

3. Public Perception and Controversies

The military's role in Turkish politics has elicited a range of opinions and controversies within Turkish society.

a. Secularist vs. Islamist

Historically, secularists have viewed the military as a guardian of Turkey's secular principles, whereas Islamists and conservatives have criticized the military's intervention as undemocratic and infringing upon popular will.

b. Erosion of Secularism

It is argued that the military's influence has sometimes undermined democratic principles and the secular nature of the state. They point to instances where military interventions curtailed civil liberties, suppressed political opposition, and restricted freedom of expression.

c. Consolidation of Power

Critics of Erdogan argue that his consolidation of power, including his control over the military, has undermined checks and balances, eroded democracy, and concentrated power in the hands of the executive.

d. Legitimacy Concerns

The military's interventions have raised questions about the legitimacy and stability of Turkey's democratic institutions. Frequent military interventions have created an atmosphere of political uncertainty and weakened trust in democratic processes.

9. Conclusion

The role of the military in Turkish politics has been a prominent and complex aspect of the country's history. Historically, the military saw itself as the guardian of secularism and national unity. Military interventions, including coups, have occurred at various points in Turkey's history, aiming to protect secularism and national stability. However, recent years have seen a shift in the military's role under Erdoğan's leadership, with efforts to curtail its influence and increase civilian oversight. Nonetheless, debates and controversies persist regarding the impact of the military on democracy, secularism, and political stability in Turkey.