



## Signs of Restructuring in the Turkish Armed Forces

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss signs that the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) may be moving toward a new command structure. They also provide insight into some of the discussions regarding a potential restructuring of the TAF.

The first two passages are by Fikret Bila, a journalist considered close to the Turkish military. Bila first discusses the 1 August meeting of the Supreme Military Council (SMC), which determined the promotions of generals and admirals. First, he points out that the structure of the SMC changed after the failed coup attempt in 2016. The Council went from having 15 army generals and admirals and being led by the Prime Minister to now being comprised of seven cabinet members (the President, Vice President, and Ministers of Justice, Defense, Treasury, Interior and Education) and four military members (the Chief of the General Staff and the Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force). The office of Prime Minister was abolished as a result of the 2017 constitutional referendum, after which Turkey moved to a presidential system, with a president and vice president.



Two Turkish soldiers salute.

Source: NATO Training Mission-AfghanistanMC2 (SW) Christopher Hall/NPASE East/NTM-A PAO via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two\\_Turkish\\_soldiers\\_salute\\_\(4699895014\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two_Turkish_soldiers_salute_(4699895014).jpg), Public domain

Bila points out that the number of army four-star generals and admirals within the TAF has gone from 15 to seven, due to retirements of some four-star generals. Meanwhile, he points out that no lieutenant general has been promoted to four-star general even if they reached the level of seniority. Bila suggests that this means “some of the army commands will be led by a lieutenant general.” He notes that, at the officer level, the promotions took place “mostly from brigadier general to major general, and from colonel to brigadier general.”

Bila also provides some insight into possible discussions taking place within the TAF. He suggests that the number of four-star generals may eventually be limited to three or four; and that army commands may be eliminated or transformed into planning and operation centers. Bila also claims that the TAF is considering reducing its number of command levels and bureaucracy, and restructuring itself based on army corps that can make faster decisions and be more agile. He suggests that the TAF may move towards a structure where army corps consist of brigades. He also reports discussions of moving towards a US model, “where active units are directly tied to force commands or to new force center commands that would be established.”

The third passage also makes a similar assessment. It reports that with the new promotions, lieutenant generals are now assigned to army commands previously led by four-star generals. Of note, only the First Army Command will be led by a four-star general. Similarly, it reports that “corp commands, which used to be led by a lieutenant general, are now being filled by major generals.” Taken together, all of these appear to signal changes to the Turkish Armed Forces. The Chief of the General Staff and the Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force all retained their positions, signaling continuity at the top. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

*“Lieutenant generals are now assigned to army commands previously led by four-star generals.... Corp commands, which used to be led by lieutenant generals, are now being filled by major generals.”*

*“This points to a new approach in the TAF’s command structure.”*



## Continued: Signs of Restructuring in the Turkish Armed Forces

**Source:** Fikret Bila, “TSK’da yeniden yapılandırma sinyalleri (Signs of a restructuring within the Turkish Armed Forces),” *T24.com*, 28 August 2019. <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/fikret-bila/tsk-da-yeniden-yapilandirma-sinyalleri,23573>

*Following the 15 July coup attempt, a series of decisions involving the TAF were made. One of the most important ones was the change in the member structure of the Supreme Military Council (SMC). The structure, which included 15 Army Generals and Admirals led by the Prime Minister, was changed. Now, the number of Military members has gone down to four (The Chief of the General Staff and the Commanders of the three Forces), and the number of civilians has gone up to seven (President, Vice President, Justice Minister, Defense Minister, Treasury Minister, Interior Minister, and Education Minister).*

*Following the last SMC meeting, the reduction in the number of Army Generals and Admirals within the TAF from 15 to seven is being seen as a sign of a future restructuring of TAF. While the four-star Generals who’ve completed their time are being retired, the fact that none of the lieutenant generals who have reached the seniority level have not been promoted to four-star generals, has led to the question of whether the number of four-star generals will be decreased even further in the new restructuring.*

*It is being reported that the number of four-star generals may be limited to three or four, army headquarters may go away or changed into just planning-operation centers. Indeed, the appointments of lieutenant generals to army headquarters are being seen as a development that points to these changes.*

*It is also being discussed that the TAF may reduce its number of command levels and bureaucracy, and be restructured based on army corps who can make faster decisions and move faster..... and move towards a structure where army corps consist of brigades.*

*... It is also being said that the TAF may move towards a US model, where active units are directly tied to force commands or to new force center commands that would be established, similar to the US model.*

*... Of course the most widely discussed issue is that it would be a mistake to base the TAF structure, promotions and commander appointments on loyalty rather than the traditional method of seniority and merit.*

**Source:** Fikret Bila, “YAŞ kararları: Orgeneral sayısı yarıya indi, hiçbir korgeneral terfi ettirilmedi, 15 Temmuz’dan sonra terfi ettirilen albaylar emekli edildi (Supreme Military Council Decisions: The number of Army Generals down to half, no lieutenant generals promoted, and colonels promoted after 15 July have been retired),” *T24.com*, 2 August 2019. <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/fikret-bila/yas-kararlari-orgeneral-sayisi-yariya-indi-hicbir-korgeneral-terfi-ettirilmedi-15-temmuz-dan-sonra-terfi-ettirilen-albaylar-emekli-edildi,23307>

*The fact that none of the lieutenant generals was promoted to four-star general is noteworthy. This means that some of the army headquarters will be led by a lieutenant general...*

...

*The promotions of officers took place mostly from brigadier general to major general, and from colonel to brigadier general. This picture points to the fact that the TAF will be run by these recently promoted officers in the next few years.*

*This points to a new approach in the TAF’s command structure. It is clear that this change is taking place with the approval of the Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, the Chief of the General Staff Yasar Guler, and of course the President Tayyip Erdogan. When taken together, the new conscription law and the decisions involving the TAF made after 15 July, all point to a restructuring within the military.*

*When looking at the Chief of the General Staff and Force Commands, there is no surprise. [Defense Minister and Former Chief of the General Staff] Hulusi Akar will continue to work together with the Chief of the General Staff Yasar Guler.... Both the Air Force Commander Gen. Hasan Kucukakyuz and the Navy Commander Admiral Adnan Ozbal’s appointments were extended, as expected. Both commanders had been promoted and appointed as commander following 15 July [2016].*

**Source:** “Ordularda korgeneral dönemi (The era of Lieutenant Generals in the Armies),” *Hürriyet*, 23 August 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ordularda-korgeneral-donemi-41309662>

*Three weeks after the Supreme Military Council, the new assignments within the Turkish Armed Forces, as signed by President Tayyip Erdogan, have been published in the Official Gazette.*

...

*With the appointment decisions, lieutenant generals are now assigned to army headquarters previously led by four-star generals. ... The only four-star general assigned to an army headquarters was Gen. Musa Avsever, assigned to the First Army Command.*

...

*Corp commands, which used to be led by a lieutenant general, are now being filled by major generals*