

Re-Evaluating The Rise Of Garrison States: Turkey And Syria In Focus

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Abstract: Reacting to the militaristic and fascist tendencies prevalent during the interwar years, American political scientist Harold Lasswell wrote in 1941: "We are moving toward a world of 'garrison states' — a world in which the specialists on violence are the most powerful group in society." Fortunately for us, we do not inhabit a world of "garrison states" today. However, tendencies associated with the garrison state have cropped up in several societies from time to time in various measures, and when unchallenged, they have weakened the democratic ethos of free societies. Some of the recent developments in our country should prompt us to ask whether we are moving towards a society where the specialists on violence (that is, military) and the associated narratives would occupy a disconcerting central place in our political imagination. The paper seeks to analyse the drifting of Syria and Turkey into becoming garrison states within the context or framework of Harold Lasswell's postulations of the garrison state. It concludes that drawing from the reality on ground in the two societies the tendency of drifting into full garrison states is very high and submits that the trend of militarizing democratic societies and using the intimidate the civilian populations should be checked.

Keywords: Re-evaluating, Rise, Garrison, States, Turkey, Syria

I. INTRODUCTION

Nearly two-thirds of a century has passed since the late Harold Lasswell's (1941) seminal work, "The Garrison State," was published in the *American Journal of Sociology*. His thesis provided a "developmental construct" that has proven useful in the scientific study of world politics for several generations. Influenced by political and military events in Germany and Soviet Russia during the Second World War, and especially the advent of aerial bombardment, Lasswell's thesis was that trends of the time pointed toward "a world in which the specialists on violence [read soldiers] are the most powerful group in society" (1941; 455). Arguably, the contextual basis of Lasswell's claim is the underlying premise

for contemporary conceptualization of a military state, one reflecting Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union and in recent times; The United States, Russia, Turkey and Syria to mention but a few. These negative images of a garrison state have undoubtedly served as motivation for civil-military relations research of the last half century--most notably in regard to the proper political role of the uniformed military in a democracy. Moreover, Lasswell's garrison state construct provided "... the first conscious, systematic, and sophisticated theory of civil-military relations" (Huntington 1957, 346; see also Stanley 1997). Scholars addressing Lasswell's hypothesis have tended to focus on the postulated methods through which the governing elite of a garrison state would wield power. These methods are condensed into what Samuel Fitch terms

“garrison state practices-- (1) centralization of power, (2) manipulation of international crises, and (3) restriction of civil or political liberties in the name of security” Fitch (1985, 33). Apparently the position advanced by Lasswell is in tandem with the today’s situations in countries such as Turkey and Syria, unfortunate as it may seem it is a reality.

II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE GARRISON STATES: A NEW WAVE IN THE DEBATE

In this context it will be quite tasking to establish precise dates in which the various resurgences in research about civil-military relations began. However, for the purpose of this study and analogy of a wave is most appropriate in that the topic seems to rise and fall at random, yet one can accurately predict that indeed other waves will follow in the debate. Such is the case of the third wave which we have brought to bear in the discussion that will follow. The second wave of interest was piqued by issues stemming from the United States’ involvement in Vietnam and Americans’ growing disdain for the government as a whole. Yet again in the early 1990s, the approximate beginning of the third wave in civil-military relations research, America found herself at war, this time in Iraq. The actual combat phase of the war was relatively uneventful; casualties were exponentially lower than expected; and the country saw the successful use of high-tech weaponry, will has a clear semblance of what is currently being witnessed in the areas under discussion namely; Turkey and Syria, except that the latter is experiencing a different wave in which case the crisis is within the states’, a scenario of antagonism between the leaders and the led. Returning to our previous point, because of the Gulf War’s outcome, the stigma of Vietnam had supposedly been rectified, and the armed forces were riding high on their success – so high, in fact, that military leaders began to openly debate the rightfulness of decisions made by the country’s civilian leaders, especially the decision to use the military for non-combat operations (see Weigley 1993; Kohn 1994; “Out of Control” 1994; Diamond and Plattner 1996; Avant 1998; Feaver and Kohn 2001; Roman and Tarr 2001; and Feaver 2003). Exacerbating the problem was the military’s openly expressed contempt for the newly elected president (see Feaver and Kohn 2001); the challenge of control over the armed forces – more precisely the issue of control dealt head-on with curbing the increasing political clout of the military – was begun anew. In 1996, Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner published their book, *Civil-Military Relations and Democracy*. Their text was a compilation of writings by noted scholars such as Samuel Huntington, Joseph Nye, Jr., and Michael Desch. In their introduction, Diamond and Plattner approached the subject of civilian leadership’s use of the armed forces in what most military leaders viewed as non-military operations. They commented that “military officials, having learned through their experiences in power that many economic, social, and political problems have no easy solutions” (Diamond and Plattner 1996, xii). They argued on the one hand, that by involving the military in foreign social and economic growth projects the distinctive role of the military as a professional combat force would be diminished. On the other hand, they

argued that civilian leaders should have more control over all aspects of the military. Moreover, they felt that military officers should focus their training on border defense and sea-lane protection along with peace operations. The position held by Diamond and Plattner is indicative of one problem in civil-military relations, there is no consensus on the appropriate roles and missions of the military. It is no surprise that the major civil-military relation issue at the time of their writing was the increasing resistance of military leaders (most notably former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell) to perform roles and missions the military deemed inappropriate (see Weigley 1993; Kohn 1994; Avant, 1998; Foster 1993; Roman and Tarr 2001; Feaver and Kohn 2001; Feaver 2003). The net effect of this resistance was the appearance that the military was using its political influence to dictate to the country’s elected leaders the tasks that it would and would not undertake. It was rather obvious that the military had in fact increased its ability to influence policy, but it should be understood that this capability had not occurred overnight; it had developed over time, but it appears that no one had developed an ability to track its progressive development. Attempting to provide a solution to the roles and missions debate, Louis Goodman offered three criteria to determine the propriety of any given military mission. First, policy makers should ensure that assignment of the mission does not inappropriately exclude another government agency while inhibiting the military’s capability to develop its core skills. Second, civilian leaders should take care that assumption of the mission does not provoke sentiments of increased privilege and prestige on the military’s part that would necessarily be construed to indicate an inappropriate level of influence in the decision making process. This concern stems from the propensity for such missions to promote the establishment of a special-interest group that may only be concerned with promoting its institutional interest; the military is not immune to such bureaucratic behavior. Finally, officials must be vigilant to detect any decrease in the military’s attention to its primary role of national defense. Any noticeable neglect in this area as a result of the assignment of another mission is an indication that the secondary mission is inappropriately assigned. Theoretically, Goodman’s criteria make a great deal of sense. In practice, however, adhering to them is problematic. Outwardly, it appears that assignment of missions is performed in a rather ad hoc fashion (this mission should belong to X, that mission to Y, etc.) with little attention given to the reality that most missions require a coordinated multiagency effort. Charles Fairbanks, Jr., wrote in “The Post-Communist Wars” that “We talk about economic reform and democracy-building but never about army-building, which is the indispensable foundation of both” (1996, 145). It seems odd that this could be true given the appearance that the military is often more focused on the first two missions, but not the last for which it should be most qualified. This may be a result of the United States’ tendency to use the military to solve any and every issue as James Fallows posited in Dunlap’s fictional account of an American coup (Dunlap 1992-93; para. 17) Fairbanks quotes Andrew Bacevich as purporting that the problem in determining appropriate roles and missions stems from America’s approach to civil-military relations. Bacevich contends that The conventional Western

model of civil-military relations emerged out of the experience of the West in the three and a half centuries between the end of the Thirty Years War (1618-48) and the fall of the Soviet Union, when there were fairly clear distinctions between war and peace, war and economic life, warrior and civilian. (quoted in Fairbanks 1996, 147-48) The distinctions referred to above had become blurred in the era of low intensity conflict in which Fairbanks wrote (perhaps they have become even more obscure in the post-9/11 world where terrorism is arguably the most imminent threat to national security.) He believed that in these new, limited conflicts, civilians could be both a victim and an active participant; it would be difficult to distinguish between the soldier and the criminal; and most perplexing, no difference would easily be made between war and peace. These new characteristics of conflict--predicted in Lasswell's *Garrison State* in 1941--would undoubtedly confound both policy-makers and the military in determining roles and missions, resulting in a worsening relationship between the two groups. In the epilogue to Diamond and Plattner's book, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., addresses the very issue of strained civil-military relations. He provides a straightforward, no-nonsense, ideological approach to the civil-military relations issue. Nye admonishes us to remember that the liberal tradition, which is a key product of our democratic heritage, establishes specific responsibilities for both the military and civilian leaders. The military must recognize that 1) armed forces are accountable to the rule of law and obliged to respect civilian authority, and that 2) armed forces are nonpartisan and remain above politics. Civilians are required to 1) recognize that armed forces are legitimate tools of democratic states; 2) fund and respect properly developed military roles and missions; and 3) educate themselves about defense issues and military culture. (Nye in Diamond and Plattner 1996, 153) Acceptance of this ideology by both civilian leadership and members of the armed forces would go far in minimizing the potential for problems to arise as a result of the appearance of undue influence of the military. Furthermore, Nye's approach offers a remedy for the ideological rift between civilian and military by recognizing that the more conservative ideology of the military must exist within the context of the traditional liberal ideology of America at large--the two ideologies are a necessary part of American culture (see also Huntington 1982). In all it is obvious that country's involved in altercations and strife have learnt from the West and indeed Communist Russia that the way to go in dealing with altercations between the ruling class and the civilian population is to set-out the military as a coercive apparatus to quell the situation, in which case there is bound to be a faceoff. It therefore goes without gainsaying that the involvement of the military as state apparatus in climes such as Syria and Turkey to manage crisis arising from the civilian population has been a tradition long practiced as has been exemplified by the United States and other world powers from the foregoing. Although, the scenarios are quite distinct and this distinction must be drawn to disabuse the mind of the audience from prejudice and concluding that the United States and even Russia are the rationale behind the acts of military involvement in the resolving issues between the civilian population and governments of these countries.

III. THE WORLDWIDE RISE OF THE GARRISON STATE

At the time that Lasswell was developing his reflections on the American middle class, he was also elaborating the concept of the "garrison state" as a theoretical construct that defined a worldwide trend that resulted from war and the expectation of war, and so was connected with historical events (Fox, 1969; Friedberg, 1992). The first historical event in question was the Japanese invasion of China. In "Sino-Japanese Crisis" (1937), Lasswell not only stated that the specialists in violence of both states might exert a determining influence on political and social life but he also argued that, if the crisis spread, the Soviet Union would become involved and such an involvement would have an impact on the internal struggle between the civilian leadership of the Communist Party and the military leadership of the Red Army. In war he argued the generals would win and establish the supremacy of military methods upon a social life already governmentalized by the abolishment of the free market and private enterprise. In his opinion; because of the interconnected relationship of world affairs, garrison states in Asia and Europe would compromise the security and undermine the prestige of civilian institutions in every nation (643-44). Lasswell concluded that what America had experienced was "a change in the line of historical evolution." Working on the theories of Comte and Spencer who saw history as a political and social progress from a military phase, based on force, toward an industrial condition, based on contract and consent, he envisaged an inversion of the sequence. Nineteenth-century Europe and North America defined "the scene of a revolution" that increasingly underplayed military skills: "the people joined the network of economic activity" and "the form of civilian state." But, from the twentieth century because of growing colonial rivalries, the outbreak of the World War I and the advance of Communism and various forms of nationalism the market had been veering toward counter-tendencies: "the expansion of violence cast a shadow on the future of human relations" (4-6). Such countertendencies explained the worldwide rise of the garrison state. Lasswell analysed this theoretical construct on the eve of the World War II, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In "The Garrison State" (1941), he singled out the modern conditions that influenced the rise of a garrison state. Firstly, the new instruments of warfare, in particular the air force, made it possible to maintain high the level of fear in large populations. Secondly, because of the introduction of new technologies in the field of administrative organization and public relations, the specialists in violence included in their training a large degree of expertise that was traditionally considered the domain of civilian life. As a result, the socialization of danger and the subordination of civilian knowledge to military expertise made possible a total mobilization of society. The garrison state would be characterized by an energetic attempt to incorporate the population into the destiny of the nation: the duty to obey, to serve the state and to work for the nation would become the cardinal virtues of society. Moreover, the military elite would undermine the fundamental institutions of civilian states: democratic procedures would disappear, rival political parties

would be suppressed, free communication and information would be abolished. Finally, government would be centralized, all social activities would be governmentalized, and free association would disappear (455-65). The above image as portrayed by Lasswell is not farfetched from the current predicament that country's such as Turkey and Syria are going through, it is indeed a phase in the history of these countries that seems to be shrouded in trials, the trial of the forces of authoritarianism versus democracy, of dictatorship versus popular rule. As we will come to see in our subsequent discussions as follows; the (aerial) bombardment of communities, the loss of lives and destruction of properties, the militarization of governance, and government institutions and of course the societies, the tyrannical fashion in which the institutions of governance tend to rule with and the internal and external conspiracies that have played out in these states have all culminated to inform the logical position that indeed these states are drifting towards the part of becoming garrison states.

IV. THE DRIFTING OF TURKEY AND SYRIA INTO GARRISON STATES: AN ANALYSIS

From the foregoing it can be deduced that part of what characterises a garrison state is the feature that its leader does not tolerate opposing views and that is borne out of a complete lust and control for power which leads to an outright dictatorship all of which stands in direct contrast to popular rule. In fact there is little else more injurious to any democracy than closing down news outlets and choking off freedom of speech which is what transpires in Turkey where the government has taken such an extreme measure based on accusations that such media outlets are aiding terrorism and conspiring against the state, this is nothing short of what Lasswell postulated in his argument on garrison states. This suppression of dissent voices and use of state apparatus to coerce people are all glaring features pointing towards the above position in the country, in fact Reporters Without Borders' 2015 World Press Freedom Index ranked Turkey 149 out of 180 countries, between Mexico, where journalists are regularly murdered, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is termed a failed state. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees "the right to freedom of opinion and expression," but as Benjamin Franklin warned, "Whoever would overthrow the Liberty of a Nation must begin by subduing the Freedom of Speech." The current Erdogan led government was highly admired for its impressive socio-political reforms and significant economic development, which made Turkey the 17th largest economy in the world during his first and much of his second term in office. It could have realized much of this ambition to make Turkey a recognized regional superpower with rallying support of the public with pride. It would have been able to do so without destroying the principles of Turkey's foundation as a democracy, as was envisioned by its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and offer a real model of a flourishing democracy to be emulated by much of the Arab and Muslim world. Sadly, however, the government ignores the fact that this systematic dismantling of Turkey's democratic institutions will have the

precise opposite effect by directly torpedoing Turkey's potential as a great power and squandering what the country has to offer thereby driving it into a garrison state. Time and again, the Erdogan led government demonstrated its lack of tolerance to opposing views and found the press to be a nuisance, as it was generally critical of its agenda. It is critical to understand, as George Orwell aptly put it, "Freedom of the press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticize and oppose," a freedom which the government is bent on suppressing. While in Syria as the civil war rages on, Syria remained one of the world's deadliest places to practice journalism in 2014. At least 17 journalists were killed and dozens more were injured, abducted, or imprisoned by the government of President Bashar al-Assad, various Syrian opposition factions, and the Islamic State (IS) militant group. And this is all as a result of the fierce crackdown and military involvement in civil matters by the regime. The regime's loss of control in many parts of the country has resulted in the emergence of new media outlets and reduced censorship in some rebel-held territories, particularly in Kurdish regions that have declared autonomy from Damascus. All of which have in real terms culminated in driving the Syrian state down the path of becoming a garrison state. We will further break down the discussion into three distinct dimensions to give a lucid description to the how almost all aspect of the Syrian society is entrenched in this saga of debilitating destruction which poses a threat to the very survival of the Syrian state.

V. LEGAL ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

Article 38 of the Syrian constitution provides for freedoms of speech and of the press, while a 2011 media law prohibits a "monopoly on the media," guarantees the "right to access information about public affairs," and bans "the arrest, questioning, or searching of journalists." In practice, however, these protections are virtually non-existent in the present day Syria. The media law bars outlets from publishing content that affects "national unity and national security" or incites sectarian strife or "hate crimes," and forbids the publication of any information about the armed forces. It holds editors in chief, journalists, and spokespeople accountable for violations, and prescribes fines of up to 1 million Syrian pounds (\$6,600). Article 3 states that the law "upholds freedom of expression guaranteed in the Syrian constitution" and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but Article 4 says the media must "respect this freedom of expression" by "practicing it with awareness and responsibility." The broad wording of this article gives the authorities leeway to crack down on independent outlets.

VI. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

Authorities in present day Syria have continued to forcibly restrict news coverage from the period of 2014 till present day. False statements and propaganda are common on state-run outlets, and all media are subject to official censorship. The General Corporation for the Distribution of Publications is responsible for prior censorship and

distribution of all printed materials in Syria. It regularly excises controversial content prior to circulation and fully blocks distribution of certain publications, a long-standing practice that has intensified with the conflict. Visas for the foreign press are restricted; journalists from allied countries, such as Russia and Iran, have almost uninhibited access, while those from democratic states are often arbitrarily denied or issued extremely short or limited permits. All journalists are subject to onerous restrictions on their movements and activities, but they are sometimes able to flout these strictures given the chaotic security situation, which weakens the government's ability to police the media.

VII. ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT IN SYRIA

In regime-held territory, the government and allied businessmen own most newspaper-publishing houses and tightly control editorial policy. Although the government opened up space for private print media in 2001, the owners of most private outlets—including *Al-Watan*, *Al-Iqtisad*, and *Al-Khabar*—have close ties to the regime. As a result, genuinely independent print media are virtually non-existent. All television channels are state owned, and the government directly controls all programming and content. New print and broadcast outlets have emerged in opposition-controlled territory, but their financing—which relies on Syrian expatriates and international NGOs—hinders viability, and staffs are mostly volunteers. Syria's war-ravaged economy is not conducive to sustaining private outlets, and the overall economic situation grew worse in 2014. Rojava is home to a number of local media outlets, including Ronahi TV, Arta FM, the bimonthly newspaper *Nudem*, the news agency Hawar News, and the website Welati. However, these too suffer from economic woes, relying on volunteers and subsidies from local and foreign Kurdish benefactors. Even foreign television stations operating in the territory, such as Kurdish outlets from northern Iraq, are economically dependent on affiliated political parties. Approximately 28 percent of Syrians accessed the internet in 2014, and social-media websites and communication tools such as Skype are increasingly used to transmit news. War-related damage to infrastructure and deliberate interference by combatants cause frequent power outages and disruption of telecommunications. Opposition groups have begun to circumvent these problems by using satellite devices to access the internet and telephone service. These are some of the pointers that these societies are indeed heading towards becoming garrison states.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Drawing from the above discussion it goes without gainsaying that the most significant indication of a garrison state is the militarisation of national security. For a garrison state, national security defined in militaristic terms would be the ultimate value to be preserved, that in the view of this paper is what characterises the Syrian and Turkish societies, and the adverse impact of seeking militarised solutions for political and social challenges is what has led to the

unfortunate reality in these societies. The problems with militarising national security are many: national security is far more complex than what military solutions can hope to resolve, and the state could use military tools (tools of violence) to confront non-military challenges. As nations, the duo of Syria and Turkey cannot afford to place a militarised response over political ones. They need to forsake their fixation with the 'Army will fix it' notion, be it during floods or when hapless children fall into uncovered borewells, there are countless, numerous other countries still suffering for having made that choice.

Despite its long-term adverse implications, the garrison state narrative comes with undeniable political benefits for the political class. Militaristic narratives undoubtedly support the governments and its ideological fountainhead. So governments have managed to use the military as a convenient political tool for electoral and publicity purposes, thereby enhancing their political clout. They have learnt the fine art of firing from the soldier's shoulder: when under fire for their policies.

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