

Chapter 2F – RECRUITING AND RETENTION OF MILITARY PERSONNEL: TURKEY

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The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) is composed of five sister services: Army, Navy, Air Force, Gendarmerie, and Cost Guard. The personnel of all services are subject to the same laws. For the professionals, it is the Turkish Armed Forces Personnel Law No. 926, and for the non-professionals, the Military Service Law No. 1111. Thus, the personnel categories are identical across the services, though the quantities in each category vary by service.

The services have the following personnel categories:

- Professionals
 - Commissioned officers;
 - Non-commissioned officers (NCOs);
 - Specialists; and
 - Civilians (officials and workers).
- Conscripts (non-professionals)
 - Reserve officers;
 - Short-term conscripts; and
 - Long-term conscripts.

Officers make up the core command structure. They come from various sources; 45% from the Military Colleges and military students in civilian universities, 13% from outstanding NCOs, and the remaining 42% from the contract officers. At present, 81% of the officers are in the Military School origin branches such as infantry, artillery, armor, transportation, ordinance, and the remaining 19% is in the civilian university origin branches such as engineer, teacher, judge, medical doctor, etc.

There are three levels of military schools for officers in Turkey. These are military high schools, military colleges, and military war academies. Students can apply for admission to a military high school after completing their 8 year compulsory education. Performance on a nation wide “aptitude + achievement” test is the first hurdle in entering a military high school, followed by background checks, interviews, medical, and physical examinations. When students are accepted to a military high school, they are not necessarily members of the armed forces, but prospective candidates.

There are three military colleges in Turkey: the Turkish Army College, the Turkish Air Force College, and the Turkish Naval College. The major sources of recruitment for these military colleges are the military high schools. Yet, based on the needs of the TAF, graduates of civilian high schools are also recruited. Performance

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on a nation wide university entrance exam is used in screening out the civilian candidates for the military colleges. Civilian high school graduates passing this first hurdle are subjected to a number of other selection/screening techniques, including background checks, interviews, medical, and physical examinations. Women have been accepted to military colleges since 1992. Currently, women can serve as officers in the TAF, but not as NCOs or enlisted personnel. After graduating from a military college or having a 4-year degree from a civilian university as a military student, officers have 15 years of obligatory service.

About 42% of the officers in the TAF are of non-military origin. They are graduates of civilian universities, specializing in a wide range of professions, such as engineering, teaching, medicine, and law. In the selection of these officers, academic performance, background checks, personality assessment, interviews, medical and physical examinations are used. Following their basic training, officers of non-military origin have a one-year try-out period during which they have the right to resign. Once this period is completed, these officers are also required to serve at least 15 years.

The purpose of the three military war academies (army, navy, and air force) is to select, train, and develop future military leaders and commanding officers of the TAF. Only graduates of military colleges, who have served at least 6 years in the TAF, could apply to these academies. Following a very rigorous selection process, candidates receive a two year graduate military education.

The NCOs stand as the intermediate command level between officers and the enlisted. The entire NCO corps comes from the NCO vocational schools. These schools accept high school graduates through an induction examination. NCO vocational schools are now equivalent of 2-year colleges. Recently, in the selection of candidates to the NCO vocational schools, personality inventories have been started to be administered along with aptitude/achievement tests, interviews, physical and medical examinations. Similar to officers, once on the job, non-commissioned officers have a 15-year obligatory service in the Turkish Armed Forces.

The specialists are professional enlisted leaders. They are employed at critical positions requiring continuity such as Squad Leader, Tank Driver, Tank Gunner, Repairer, Artillery Sergeant, etc. These specialists are selected from among qualified conscripts who have finished their military service. Their first contract is for 2 years, and later contracts may be between 1 to 5 years depending on the qualification of the person, his willingness, and the requirements of the service. They can serve until the age of 45 when they retire with pension pay and benefits.

Civilians are composed of state officials and workers. Civilian officials and workers are employed at positions requiring expertise and continuity, and they are selected according to educational proficiency.

Compulsory military service is embedded in the Constitution of the Turkish Republic. Every male citizen “has a right and duty to serve in the military” by our Constitution, though it does not specify conscription, voluntary or any other method. The Constitution leaves the description of the “manner how this service is rendered” to subordinate laws.

Service category and duration for the conscripts are determined according to the person’s educational attainment. University graduates (holders of a bachelor’s degree or higher) either serve as conscripted reserve officers at the rank of a third lieutenant or short-term conscripts with no ranks. Conscripted reserve officers are utilized to back up the manning shortages in the regular officer positions, which could not be filled by regulars due to shortages in the junior officer ranks.

About 30% of the university graduates are selected by the services to serve 12 months as conscripted reserve officers in the skill areas (in terms of professions) needed by the TAF, whereas the rest serve 6 months as

short-term conscripts. Personal preferences for service category and duration are taken into account, but with a lower priority than the needs of the services.

Those who have less than a 4-year university education have to serve 15 months as long-term conscripts. Conscripts subject to 15-month service undergo a 3-month basic and branch training and then are distributed to the troops.

The personnel mobilization system is also largely based on conscription. Recently released conscripts are assigned to the military units in their locality to be called up at mobilization. Most of these personnel do not undergo any refresher training with the implicit assumption that since they are released in the past three years, they will not need any extra training. Thus when they join their units, these units will be ready for combat even on the first day of the mobilization.

On June 2003, the Turkish Armed Forces took an important step toward reducing the size of the country's military. Accordingly, the period of obligatory military service was reduced from 18 months to 15 months for those who have less than a 4-year university education (i.e., long-term conscripts), from 8 months to 6 months for some of the candidates with a four-year degree (i.e., short-term conscripts), and from 18 months to 12 months for the remaining candidates with a four-year university degree (i.e., conscripted reserve officers). This move is part of the restructuring efforts, planned to be completed by the year 2020. Currently, 550,000 soldiers and 200,000 professional officers serve in the TAF. Over time, the military plans to decrease the number of conscripts to 300,000.

