



Democracy or Stability: The US Policy Towards Turkish Experiment in Democracy 1945-1980

Demokrasi ya da İstikrar: ABD'nin Türkiye'nin Demokrasi Deneyimine Yönelik Politikası 1945-1980

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ABSTRACT

The concept of democracy plays an important role in the US foreign policy. American Presidents use democracy as a motivating force for their policies worldwide. This study examines the policies of the American administrations concerning the democratic developments and coups in the Republic of Türkiye between 1945 and 1983. The influence of the US administration, as the most important proponent of liberal democracy, on Türkiye's transition to multi-party rule and its approach to the coups of May 27, September 12, and the March 12 memorandum will be discussed based on the American sources in the present study. In addition to the American National Archives, Congressional Records, Official Publications, the American newspapers of the period, and the memoirs of diplomats who served in Türkiye were used as the primary sources of the study. These sources enabled the evaluation of the development of Turkish democracy from the American perspective. The US attitude towards Turkish democracy will also reveal whether democracy is a goal or a tool of the US foreign policy towards Türkiye.

Keywords: Democracy, Coup, Military Intervention, USA

ÖZ

Demokrasi kavramı ABD dış politikasında önemli bir role sahiptir. Amerikan Başkanları demokrasiyi dünya genelindeki politikalarının motive edici gücü olarak kullanmaktadır. Bu araştırma, 1945-1980 yılları arasında Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde yaşanan demokratik gelişmelere ve darbelere ilişkin Amerikan yönetimlerinin politikalarını incelemektedir. Liberal demokrasinin en önemli savunucusu olan ABD yönetiminin Türkiye'nin çok partili hayata geçişi üzerindeki etkisi, Türkiye'de gerçekleşen 27 Mayıs, 12 Eylül darbesine ve 12 Mart muhtırasına yaklaşımları Amerikan kaynaklarına dayanarak ele alınacaktır. Amerikan Ulusal Arşivinin yanında Kongre Tutanakları, Resmi Yayınlar, döneme ait basın ve Türkiye'de görev yapmış diplomatların hatıraları araştırmada birincil kaynaklar olarak kullanılmıştır. Bu kaynaklar, Türk demokrasinin gelişim sürecinin Amerikan perspektifinden değerlendirilmesine imkân sağlamıştır. ABD'nin Türk demokrasisi karşısındaki tutumu, demokrasinin ABD'nin Türkiye'ye yönelik dış politikasının bir hedefi mi yoksa aracı mı olduğunu da ortaya koyacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Demokrasi, ABD, Darbe, Askeri Müdahale



Introduction

The US regularly criticized Turkish democracy after Joe Biden won the US presidential election on November 3, 2020. An international organization called “Turkish Democracy Project” was founded in Washington in June 2021. “Steering Türkiye towards more democratic policies that protect democratic institutions and human rights” is the stated mission of organization on its webpage. Six months after the establishment of the organization, Türkiye was not invited to the Democracy Summit convened by the US President Biden in Washington, and the US administration’s critical discourse against Turkish democracy became more and more intense. This approach, prominent in the US policy towards Türkiye, should not be considered a simple discourse. Founded in 2006 in Washington, the “Middle East Democracy Project” was instrumental in the process that started in Tunisia in 2010 and plunged many Arab states into chaos. Therefore, it is necessary to examine meticulously what concepts such as democracy and human rights mean in international politics. A historical perspective will give the most accurate answer to the issue of whether the idea of democracy is a means or an end for the U.S. To evaluate the recent attitude of the US, it is necessary to consider the position of the US in Türkiye’s democracy adventure from a historical perspective.

In this study, the US approach to Turkish democracy is analyzed holistically within the historical process. The prominent developments in the history of democracy in Türkiye after the establishment of the Republic are analyzed based on the documents in the American National Archives and the American Press. After the Second World War, significant changes occurred in the international balance of power. As a superpower, the US began to shape world politics, which, in turn, increased the importance of the US for Türkiye. Simultaneously, the USSR’s post-war demands for territory and military bases in the Straits from Türkiye revealed the power struggle between the US and the USSR. In this struggle, the US claimed to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Near Eastern and Middle Eastern countries. At this point, promoting political and economic liberalism was the most effective method to achieve the US interests.

The U.S. support for democracy overseas is a common theme. However, few studies have examined whether it is an instrument of American foreign policy. This study attempts to answer the following questions; is democracy a tool for the US policymakers? What was the impact of American aid during and after World War II on Türkiye’s transition to multi-party rule? Why were the regime changes after the interventions in Türkiye accepted by the US? Did the US intervene in the coups that occurred in Türkiye? Or did it prefer to work only with the strong and winning side? Was the US aware of the military interventions before they took place? If so, what was their reaction? In addition, the question of which direction the administration takes when the liberal democratic goals of the US conflict with its security

goals in foreign policy will be answered by looking at the military intervention processes in Türkiye.

Transition to Democracy in Türkiye and the US Policy

Türkiye has adopted democracy as a political system since the foundation of the Republic. However, this system could not be put into practice until the 1946 elections. The “freedom to choose”, one of the basic principles of democracy, was offered to the Turks at the level of general elections only in the 1946 elections. During the single-party period, general elections were held at regular intervals. However, when the elections held before 1950 are examined, it can easily be seen that these elections were far from being democratic. Before the establishment of the Democrat Party, only the ruling party entered the elections as a single party, and the voters naturally did not have a right to choose.

However, the Allied victory in the Second World War forced İnönü to take steps towards democratization.¹ The end of single-party governments in Italy and Germany, Türkiye’s signing of the United Nations Charter, and its rapprochement with the democratic countries of the West weakened the single-party regime in Türkiye. In particular, as Türkiye’s relations with the USSR became tense, democracy emerged as a more attractive form of government. Türkiye was determined to counter the USSR’s policies. Thus, the Western alliance was the only source of hope. İnönü’s choice could be interpreted as stemming from distinct foreign policy objectives. That is to say, Türkiye aimed to join the Western alliance, requiring significant democratic reforms. However, it is challenging to conclusively demonstrate that the situation was this straightforward.²

In the new world order that emerged after the war, the US led the Western alliance as the biggest military and economic power. For this reason, the Turkish rulers, who wanted to balance the USSR threat with the US alliance, stated that “the closer the US navy is to us, the better it is for us”.³ Especially when the Soviets raised their demands against Türkiye in 1945, it signaled a new period of pressure on Türkiye. Following the announcement of these demands, a tense and isolated period that would last until the spring of 1946 began for Türkiye.

At a time when Türkiye was isolated abroad and the regime was discredited at home, political, military, and economic support from the US provided a favorable atmosphere for Türkiye to change its shell. However, the Turkish-American rapprochement that coincided

1 Kemal Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1959, p. 140.

2 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774*, Routledge, New York 2013, p. 79.

3 Şuhnaz Yılmaz, *From Stranger to Allies*, Princeton University, The Department of Near Eastern Studies, Unpublished Phd Thesis, New Jersey 2000, p. 187.

with Türkiye's democratization was not the driving force of this transformation. At least for the American administration, Türkiye's regime or democratization has not been the decisive force in relations. The US supported Türkiye against the Russians in 1945-1946, but the U.S. did not urge her to democratize.⁴ The main concern of the US was to keep Türkiye in the Western camp and thus protect American interests in the Middle East at a time when the world was rapidly evolving towards two poles. The idea of democracy and human rights, which were frequently voiced by American administrators, were also used to build public opinion against the USSR. A closer look at the US approach to Türkiye's democratization process reveals that rhetoric and practice do not always coincide.

The transition to a multiparty period marked an important break in Türkiye's political system. However, the US was one of the deaf countries to least these changes. Even Radio Moscow, in its May 19 message, stated that the youth had important duties for establishing democratic principles, while the US remained silent.⁵ When we look at the process of the establishment of the Democrat Party, it is seen that the US was again not very much interested. While rumors were circulating that Adnan Menderes and Fuat Köprülü had been expelled from the RPP (Republican People's Party) and that a new party would be founded, US Ambassador to Ankara Wilson, in a telegram sent to Washington on October 19, 1945, stated in a telegram that it was risky to move forward on the path of political democracy considering the relations with Russia and that it was not recommended for the time being.⁶

As Türkiye progressed in its path to democracy, the US interest in Türkiye began to grow. However, the source of this interest was not the changes in Türkiye's political structure, but the political and economic interests of the US. After the victory against Germany, a conflict of interests between the US, Britain, and the USSR was inevitable, spanning Europe, Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Straits. In the words of a military attaché in Moscow, "Seeking cooperation between Communism and Capitalism is like climbing a tree to catch fish."⁷

This conflict also led to a change in the cautious policies of the parties during the war. Türkiye, with its position in the region and its military forces, was the only regional power

4 Efe Sıvış, *ABD Dışişleri Belgeleri Işığında Türkiye'de Çok Partili Hayata Geçiş*, Istanbul University Social Sciences Institute Department of Political Science and International Relations, Unpublished Phd Thesis, Istanbul 2018, p. 52.

5 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegraph From AmEmbassy Ankara to SecState Washington, Subject: Moscow Radio Broadcasts Friendly Greeting to Turkish Youth, May 23, 1945, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 1, Confidential.

6 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From AmEmbassy Ankara to SecState Washington, October 19, 1945, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 1, Secret.

7 Digital National Security Archive (DNSA) Collection, *National Security Agency Organization and Operations, 1945-2009*, Intelligence Summary – Red, No:68, December 21, 1945, Top Secret "U" (Online, October, 23 2023).

that could prevent the USSR from penetrating the Middle East. For the US Administration responsible for the Middle East at that time, the Soviet Union and its Balkan allies were probing for weakness in Türkiye, Iran, and Greece. They would also attempt to penetrate the weak, new Arab states.⁸ In the words of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, it is “like a stopper in the neck of the bottle, the most important factor to prevent Soviet influence from flowing into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East”.⁹

It was the first three months of 1946 when the US-USSR conflict came to the surface. The conflict of interests in the Middle East region manifested itself in two main events: the first was the issue of the evacuation of Iran, which was occupied by the Allies during the war, and the second was the debate over the regime of the Turkish straits, i.e. amendment of the Montreux Straits Convention.

This situation, which threatened the interests of the US and Britain in the Middle East, increased Türkiye’s importance. Britain did not have the power to determine the fate of the region in the post-war period. Churchill, who had asked for US help to save Britain from Hitler during the Second World War, called on America to protect the British empire against Russian communism in his speech at Fulton in March 1946.¹⁰ On February 24, 1947, British Minister John Balfour told Washington that military-economic aid to Greece and Türkiye could no longer be provided, and he asked whether the US would take up the burden starting April 1, 1947.¹¹ This power vacuum not only facilitated the influence of the US in the region but also increased the importance of regional allies. In addition to this, Türkiye was facing increasing pressure from the USSR, which helped the US administration to ally with Türkiye.

The report sent by Washington to the Ankara Embassy on October 21, 1946, with the classification of “top secret” is important in showing the post-war US policy towards Türkiye. The report, prepared by the Near East Office of the US State Department, provides concrete justifications since it is largely based on the report prepared by the US General Staff on August 24. According to the report, the developments in 1946 increased Türkiye’s importance in the international arena. Türkiye was one of the few states close to the Soviet Union but not under its control. According to Washington, the USSR’s failure to renew the Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression of 1925, its territorial demands from Türkiye, and the USSR’s move towards a bilateral agreement with Türkiye on the Straits were clear signs of its efforts to

8 George McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 1990, p. 5

9 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From SecState Washington to AmEmbassy Ankara, Subject:Memorandum on Turkey, October 21, 1946, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 1, Top Secret.

10 “Anglo-American Pact Urged as British Visitor Warns Against Russia’s Ascendancy”, *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1946, p. 8.

11 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From Near East Affairs-Mr. Henderson to SecState, Office Memorandum, February 24, 1947, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 2, Top Secret

make Turkiye a Soviet satellite. The American government thought that the USSR aimed to use Turkiye as a springboard to the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Near East.¹² As a result, it was underlined that Turkiye should not come under the USSR's dominance or control since it would be extremely detrimental to the American national security interests.¹³

The US State Department and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff have taken action in the face of these developments in the Middle East, which they see as a threat to American interests, and have updated their policies towards Turkiye. This new policy has 4 main pillars. These are categorized as diplomatic, economic, military, and moral. While taking Turkiye's side against the USSR's territorial demands and changes in the Straits regime constituted the diplomatic side of this policy, financial loans constituted the economic pillar. In military terms, the main priority was to provide Turkiye with the materials she needed. If the UK could not send the weapons and military supplies that Turkiye needed, the US would directly provide them and deliver them to Turkiye. Another aspect of the policy towards Turkiye is based on moral values. This is basically to convince the American public to accept the policy of supporting Turkiye. The American government needed to explain the political, strategic, and moral reasons for this policy to the American public. Meanwhile, the Turkish government had to prove that it was committed to the principles enshrined in the United Nations charter.¹⁴

The moral dimension of the policy towards Turkiye was of key importance. The American public must be convinced of this policy, which aimed to establish a sphere of influence in Turkiye before the USSR. In the persuasion process, it was necessary to show that Turkiye was a country on the democratic front and to emphasize that a Turkiye under the influence of the USSR would be detrimental to the US interests in the region. At this point, Turkiye's democracy journey was crucial for the US. American administrators tried to create public sympathy by praising Turkish democracy, especially in the US.

The most important development indicating the growing US interest in the region was the American military and economic aid provided for Turkiye. It was March 12, 1947, when this support to Turkiye was given. The US President Truman stated that every nation must choose between alternative forms of life. One of these alternatives is based on the will of the majority, free institutions, free elections, protection of individual rights, freedom of expression, and political freedoms. The other is based on the imposed will of the minority

12 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From SecState Washington to AmEmbassy Ankara, Subject:Memorandum on Turkey, October 21, 1946, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 1, Top Secret.

13 Ekavi Athanassopoulou, "Western Defence Developments and Turkey's Search for Security in 1948", *Middle Eastern Studies*, XXXII/2 (1996), p. 101.

14 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegraph From SecState Washington to AmEmbassy Ankara, Subject:Memorandum on Turkey, October 21, 1946, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 1, Top Secret.

on the majority, terror, fear, a controlled press, and the suppression of personal freedoms.¹⁵ With these words, President Truman asked each nation to choose a path for itself, or more accurately, to choose one of these paths. Truman received authorization from Congress on May 22, 1947, for this policy that would go down in history as the Truman Doctrine. On July 12, 1947, an aid agreement was signed between Türkiye and the US.

The preface of the July 12 Agreement states that Türkiye asked the US for help to protect its independence and freedom, and that the US accepted this request to open an auspicious phase in relations and strengthen the ties between the two nations. When we look at the background of Truman's policy towards Türkiye, we see that it was based on economic interests rather than freedom, democracy, and human rights. Exactly one year before President Truman uttered the words that would become known as the "Truman Doctrine", the US General Staff prepared a detailed report on American interests in Türkiye. According to this report dated March 13, 1946, the USSR's demand for military bases in the Turkish Straits would cause the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean to come under the influence of the USSR. Thanks to its strategic location, Türkiye would be an obstacle to the USSR's access to rich oil deposits.¹⁶

When we look at the debates that took place in the American Congress during the days when the planned aid to Türkiye was being discussed, we see that it was not Türkiye's democracy that was being discussed, but rather the "vital interests" of the US. On March 31-April 1, 1947, the Congress debated the issue of aid to Türkiye and Greece. In his speech on April 1, 1947, Representative Holifield stated that aid to Greece was not based on humanitarian grounds, just as aid to Türkiye was not because the Turkish people were hungry or semi-democratic.¹⁷ Holifield stated that the US interests in the Middle East region were in jeopardy and that Bahrain Petroleum Co. and Arabian-American Oil Co. in Saudi Arabia were wholly owned by Americans, while Iraq Petroleum Co. and Quawait Oil Co. in Iraq and Kuwait were 23.75% and 50% owned by Americans respectively. Holifield continues as follows;

*"Let us be frank and admit that the Turkish portion of the loan has two great reasons behind it. First, preservation of the status quo in regard to the Dardanelles, and second, the protection of American, Dutch, French, and British chestnuts in the oil deposits of the Middle East. The subject of oil, therefore, cannot be divorced from our consideration of the Greek-Turkish aid bill and we should openly acknowledge its involvement."*¹⁸

15 "Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine. March 12, 1947." ProQuest. (Online March 27, 2023).

16 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegraph From The Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of State March 13, 1946, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 19. Top Secret.

17 Mr. Holifield, "The Greco-Turkish Aid Proposal", *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 1st Session, XCIII/III, (April 1, 1947), p. 2996.

18 Ibid.

When the content of the American aid to Türkiye is analyzed, it appears that the main purpose of this aid was to increase Türkiye's military power. In the report of the State Department's Committee on Aid to Greece and Türkiye dated April 24, 1947, it was emphasized that the aid would be military in nature and that economic aid would be provided for projects directly related to the military program.¹⁹ For this reason, the committee that would organize the aid was largely composed of military personnel.

Similarly, a CIA report prepared in 1948 stated that Türkiye siding with the US would secure oil resources and strategic communication facilities in the Near and Middle East.²⁰ The report pointed out that the U.S. support for Türkiye was economically important and as the Turkish economy developed, new market opportunities for the U.S. goods and services would emerge. The report also emphasizes Türkiye's military importance, noting that a pro-Western Türkiye is not only essential for the Near and Middle East but also for Europe. According to the report, attacks on vital USSR targets could be launched from air bases in Türkiye, and Türkiye would give its allies precious time to activate other bases while Türkiye was countering a possible Soviet attack.²¹ In other words, by being the first country to respond to a Soviet attack, Türkiye would minimize the possible damage to its allies.

Like the American legislative branch, the executive branch also considers democracy as a tool. The US State Department's report dated May 5, 1949 stated that Türkiye's efforts in the transition to democracy should be supported by appropriate means.²² According to the State Department, Türkiye's independent, stable, and pro-Western democratic stance ensures the security of US interests in the region.²³

It was a prominent emphasis in the American press that democratization was useful to prevent Soviet expansionism.²⁴ Washington Post columnist Stewart Alsop argued that the policy towards Türkiye was based directly and solely on America's vital interests in the face of Soviet expansionist ambitions. According to Alsop, it is a grave mistake to portray the US as "*a brave white knight fighting for a strange Middle Eastern version of democracy*".

19 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Departmental Interim Greece-Turkey Assistance Committee, April 24, 1947, Subject: Nature of U.S. Program of Aid to Turkey, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 2. Secret.

20 CIA Report Situation Report-1/1, 22.12.1948, Subject: Turkey, CIA-RDP78-01617A001400020001-3 <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/> (Online April 1, 2023)

21 Ibid.

22 NARA, RG 59, *1945-1949 Central Decimal Files*, Department of State Policy Statement, May 5, 1949, Box 3392, Secret.

23 Ibid.

24 Stewart Alsop, "Our Fine Aims Amuse the East", *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1947, p. B5.

Mr. Taylor, "Aid to Greece and Turkey", *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 1st Session, XCIII/3, (March 31, 1947), p. 2868.

Mr. Bender, "Loans to Greece", *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 1st Session, XCIII/3, (March 31, 1947), p. 2930.

The only way to serve the American interests in the region is to promote a certain degree of democracy and raise people's living standards.²⁵ Another article in the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued that democracy is the most effective way to kill communism. Benjamin Mays wrote that Türkiye and Greece did not receive aid because they were or would become democracies, but because of the struggle for influence between the US and the USSR.²⁶ Among this news in the American press, Walter Lippmann's article published in the *Boston Globe* is short but important in terms of giving the essence of the issue. Lippmann wrote that the Truman Doctrine was not a law to establish democracy in Türkiye and Greece, but a law to make the US effective in the Middle East.²⁷ Lippmann argued that Congress had no choice but to approve Truman Aid in order to become the heir to the empire that the British had liquidated in the Middle East.²⁸

When the economic, military and administrative support provided by the Truman administration to Türkiye is evaluated as a whole, it is not very different from the policies implemented by the USSR in countries such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia. Although there was no prospect of imminent war, the US managed to exploit the existing tensions for its own interests. Various reports of the US General Staff and the State Department state that the USSR did not attempt to attack Türkiye, that it did not have the economic power to wage such a war, and that the USSR could not afford a new war since the US was the only power with atomic bombs.²⁹

Although Truman did not take a step that would mean interfering in Türkiye's internal affairs, he tried to hide his struggle for influence against the USSR in this geography behind phrases such as democracy, free elections and self-governance. The direct involvement of the US administration instead of the United Nations, an organization established to ensure world peace, is important in terms of understanding the purpose of the American administration. The fact that the US helped Türkiye and Greece by ignoring the UN presented a heavy blow to the prestige of the UN. Further, President Truman, who underlined preventing the USSR's expansion into the Middle East, did not mention America's expansion into this region.

Considering the US approach to the democratization of Türkiye between 1945 and 1950, we see that this process was supported by the US while Türkiye was trying to get used to multi-party life. However, the US did not push for democratization, nor was this

25 Stewart Alsop, "Our Fine Aims Amuse the East", *The Washington Post*, April 27, 1947, p. B5.

26 Benjamin Mays, "Communism: In Greece, Turkey and U.S." *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 26, 1947, p. 7

27 Walter Lippmann, "Congress Must Support the Greek-Turkish Bill", *The Boston Globe*, April 22, 1947, p. 14.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

29 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From War Department to Secretary of State, Subject: Military Assistance to Turkey, March 13, 1947, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 2. Top Secret.

NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1945-1949*, Telegram From AmEmbassy Ankara to Secretary of State, March 5, 1947, Microfilm M 1292, Roll 2. Secret.

issue a determining factor in bilateral relations. Among the State Department documents in the American archive on Turkiye's bilateral relations with the US between the years 1945 and 1950, there is not a single document indicating pressure for political transformation or democratization. Likewise, in the telegrams sent from Turkish missions to Washington, Turkiye's democratization or transition to a multi-party system was not a priority agenda. Communist activities and relations with the USSR were the issues that were carefully monitored. The expansion or contraction of democratic freedoms did not have a significant impact on Washington's decision to support Turkiye. The US support was not the locomotive of this transformation, nor was its primary objective to democratize Turkiye.

Following the establishment of the multi-party-political system in Turkiye, Turkish democracy was subjected to military interventions four more times in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. On May 27, 1960, a military junta overthrew the government and seized power, citing the authoritarian policies of the DP. In March 1971, in an atmosphere of chaos caused by the growing anti-Americanism in the country, the military forced the government to resign under the threat of intervention. On September 12, 1980, under the shadow of political and economic instability, the soldiers reappeared on the political scene, overthrew the government and established an absolute rule by shutting down all political parties.

Of the military interventions included in this research, the period of the May 27, 1960 coup d'état and the March 12, 1971 memorandum are available for research in the US National Archives. Records from 1980 are also partially accessible. The post-1980 period is not declassified. In addition, in many cases, it is not possible to explain the relationship between the US and coups and memorandums in Turkiye or other countries based on documents. Like all states, the US avoids making documents available in the archives that would cause severe criticism of its foreign policy. However, it is still possible to see the attitude and perception of the US administration towards the military interventions in Turkiye.

Military Coups in Turkiye and the U.S. Policy Towards the Coups

For a coup to succeed, overthrowing the current administration is not enough. Rather, the coup should be recognized by other international actors. Without this, the new government would be vulnerable, lacking political and economic support. At this point, the US approach to the coups is of vital importance, ensuring the continuity of the coup regimes. For this reason, the US policy towards the military interventions of 1960, 1971 and 1980 in Turkiye and the military-economic aid provided to military governments are worth analyzing.

The overthrow of Menderes government on May 27, 1960, with a military coup is one of the most important ruptures in Turkish political history. The May 27, 1960 coup not only overthrew the government but also revived an old Ottoman tradition as the first coup d'état

in the Republic of Türkiye. Türkiye established a multi-party political life with a rare calm in the world. However, with the May 27 coup, she left an unforgettable stain on the history of Turkish democracy.

The May 27 coup was the last in the history of the Republic that was carried out outside the chain of command and was “successful”.³⁰ The real reasons for the May 27 coup should be sought in the period between 1945 and 1960. What is meant by “looking for reasons” here is not to legitimize or justify the coup, but to reveal the background of a historical phenomenon.

DP’s inflationary policies, the authoritarian tendency of Menderes after 1957 elections, erosion of the prestige that soldiers enjoyed were some of the reasons behind May 27 coup d’état. From the establishment of the Republic until the 1950 elections, Türkiye was ruled by the leading generals of the Independence War. However this administration was not an absolute military rule. In October 1923, immediately after the proclamation of the Republic, a decision was taken requiring soldiers involved in politics to leave their active duties. Soldiers who preferred politics took off their uniforms, but the influence of well-known generals such as Mustafa Kemal and İsmet İnönü remained unchallenged on the army. During this period, soldiers were prevented from getting involved in politics and were even banned from reading newspapers.³¹ During the period before 1945, when the one-party government was in power, the interest of the soldiers in politics continuously decreased.

On the other hand, 1945 -1960 was a period in which the Turkish military underwent a structural, technological, and mental transformation the military experienced multi-party life on the one hand and felt the power of the alliance with the US on the other. The visits of young officers within NATO, the training they received, and the knowledge and experience they gained increased their interest in politics. The deterioration of the internal political situation led Menderes to seek external support.

With the changes they made in the high rankings of the army, the Democrats aimed to keep the military away from any intervention against them. With some retired generals joining the DP, the impression that the army was in the same line with the government was created.³² However, these steps were not enough to prevent the formation of a junta within the army. On the morning of May 27, 1960, a 37-member junta, namely the Committee of National Unity (CNU), composed of young officers, overthrew the government and seized control of the country.

30 Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London and Newyork: Routledge 2002. p. 121.

31 Ibid., p. 9.

32 Ibid., p.10.

It is impossible to say that the May 27 coup was a surprise for the US. In the spring of 1960, anyone who read the news in the American press could easily see that the possibility of a coup in Türkiye was not far away. Several newspaper reports suggested that the army was uncomfortable with the situation in Türkiye and, that the army might abandon neutrality and intervene in politics³³.

Likewise, it is impossible to say that the US State Department was unprepared for the coup. The State Department's Near East division warned the Operations Coordination Board (OCR), which had taken an unusually keen interest in the growing tensions in Türkiye's internal political situation, not to take sides in the relationship between Menderes and his opponents. The OCR should be advised that taking sides in the growing tensions in Türkiye could jeopardize US strategic interests, such as access to bases.³⁴

The economic crisis in Türkiye and the withdrawal of support from the US led the Democratic Party to diversify its foreign policy with other countries, especially the USSR.³⁵ The US and NATO were concerned about Menderes' proposal to negotiate with the USSR, as he wanted to maintain control of the country at all costs.³⁶ At a meeting of the US National Security Council on April 28, 1960 Allen Dulles from the CIA stated that the situation in Türkiye was critical and that if constitutional processes were not followed properly, a situation similar to that in Korea would emerge.³⁷ The Central Intelligence Bulletin of January 16, 1960 stated that "...some army officers have been highly critical of the oppressive tactics used against Inonu and other opposition politicians..." and adds if the government tries to rig the election, forceful action against the government may follow.³⁸ Another CIA report dated as April 20, 1960 clearly states that irritation is high military cycles against government and that the present situation contains new and potentially dangerous implications for Turkish Democracy and the security of the state.³⁹

33 "Turks Jostle, Boo Menderes; Want him Out", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1960, p. 10.

Jay Walz, "Role of Military Debated By Turks", *The New York Times*, May 8, 1960, p. 2.

34 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Turkish Affairs Desk 1958-1963*, Telegram From NEA – Parker T. Hart to G – Mr. Hare, Subject: Discussion of Turkish Political Situation at OCB Luncheon Meeting, April 26, 1960, Box 3, Secret.

35 Murat Kasapsaraçoğlu, "Soğuk Savaş Döneminde Türkiye'de Yapılan Askeri Darbeler ve ABD", *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, XIX/3 (2020), p. 1347.

36 Christopher Gunn, "The 1960 Coup in Turkey: A U.S. Intelligence Failure or a Successful Intervention?" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, XVII/2 (2015), p. 137.

37 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Memorandum of Discussion, X, p. 833.

38 Central Intelligence Bulletin, January 16, 1960, Document Number: C03031263, *Central Intelligence Bulletin Collection*. Top Secret. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/03031263> (Online April 1, 2023)

39 Central Intelligence Bulletin, April 20, 1960, Document Number: CIA-RDP79T00975A005000440001-7, *Central Intelligence Bulletin Collection*. Top Secret. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/03031263> (Online April 1, 2023)

The US National Security Council Reports, State Department documents and CIA reports prepared before the 1960 coup in Türkiye indicate that Türkiye was in crisis and that the military might intervene. Regarding the US approach to the crisis in this difficult situation of Turkish democracy, we see that American interests were the main concern rather than democracy. According to the Department of State, the best U.S. posture for that time was to regard recent developments in Türkiye as an internal political affair and stay out.⁴⁰ Protecting the strategic interest of the US and the continued use of military bases has always been the main objective of policymakers.

When we look at the post-May 27 US approach to the coup, we see that the US did not make a discourse against the coup. The essence of Turkish-American relations remained unchanged because of the extent and quality of the political, economic, and military collaboration that the Turkish military strongly supported.⁴¹ Although the April 4, 1949, NATO treaty aimed to protect the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, the US refrained from criticizing the coup, even though all of these principles were violated in Türkiye. The US welcomed the coup in Türkiye. Only one day after the coup, on May 28, 1960, Warren, the US Ambassador to Ankara, visited Cemal Gürsel in his office in the General Staff building. During this meeting, the coup in Türkiye was discussed. Warren stated that he had witnessed many coups while he was working in Latin America, but this was by far the most precise, most efficient and most rapid coup d'état that he had ever witnessed.⁴² In his talk to Gürsel, Warren named the coup as “revolutionary movement” and added his attitude would be helping Gürsel’s endeavors, the junta, and succeeding governments’ problems.⁴³

On 11 July, 1960 in his letter to Gürsel, President Eisenhower expressed his satisfaction with Türkiye’s enduring ties with the West. Eisenhower also wished success in realizing the goals of the military junta in Türkiye.⁴⁴ President Dwight Eisenhower of the US evaluated the coup leaders’ pro-American stances rather than attempting to save the democratically elected Menderes administration. Washington recognized the new government a few days later, satisfied with the goals of the new military administration.⁴⁵ Only three days after the coup the US Department of State announced the elevation of Izmir Consulate to the rank of consulate general.⁴⁶ This is a sign of developing relations in the region and more

40 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Telegram From the Department of State to Secretary of State Herter, May 1, 1960, X, p. 837.

41 Çağrı Erhan and Efe Sivış. “Determinants of Turkish-American Relations and Prospects for the Future.” *Insight Turkey*, XIX/1 (2017), p. 93.

42 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Telegram From the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State, May 28, 1960, X, p. 845. *Ibid.*, p. 846.

44 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Letter From President Eisenhower to President Gürsel, June 11, 1960, X, p. 850.

45 Çağrı Erhan and Efe Sivış. “Determinants of Turkish-American Relations and Prospects for the Future.” *Insight Turkey*, XIX/1 (2017), p. 94.

46 *The Department of State Bulletin*, Press Release 292 dated May 31, “Consulate at Izmir, Raised to Consulate General”, XLII/1095 (June 1960), U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 1973, p. 1010.

importantly a sign of trust that the US government attached to the new military government. A report prepared for the U.S. on June 23rd, about a month after the coup, stated that after the bloodless coup in Türkiye, the military was calmly in control of the country, that the Turks remained committed to NATO and CENTO, and that there was no change in Turkish foreign policy.⁴⁷ The report also outlined the objectives of American policy towards military-ruled Türkiye. The political and economic objectives of the US were to ensure a stable government in Türkiye, to keep communist party activities under control, and to provide an economy capable of resisting communist occupation and protecting the independence and territorial integrity of the country. On the military side, keeping the Turkish army as a part of the allied defense forces, making Türkiye's resources and military bases available to the US, and increasing Türkiye's share in defense expenditures were put forward as the goals of American foreign policy.⁴⁸

To achieve these objectives and maintain the existing military and political positions, special attention was paid to meet the demands of the CNU. The American administration increased its aid from 46.4 million dollars for 1961 to 90 million dollars by adding 43.6 million dollars.⁴⁹ The US even paid the financial burdens of the junta's decision to retire a large group of generals. Gürsel asked for 100 Million Turkish Liras to implement his plan for the early retirement of generals. After consultations, the Department of State decided to make a payment to CNU.⁵⁰ The legal bar to use U.S. aid funds was bypassed by providing financing for other parts of the Turkish budget, instead of a retirement plan.⁵¹ Ambassador Warren reported to Washington that to protect the interests of the US and the Western World, the US should be as considerate and helpful to the Gürsel Government as possible.⁵² Another report to the US Department of Defense by the Near East Division of the State Department dated November 17, 1960, mentioned the benefits of a close relationship with Gürsel and stated that it would be beneficial for bilateral relations if Gürsel was provided with the L-23 aircraft that he requested for his travels in Türkiye.⁵³

After the coup, Turkish-American relations continued to be close and friendly. In the meetings of the American Ambassadors with the Turkish Foreign Minister Sarper and the President of the CNU Cemal Gürsel, the close relations between Türkiye and the US were

47 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Turkish Affairs Desk 1958-1963*, Suggestions for NSC Planning Board, June 23, 1960, Box 1, Confidential.

48 Ibid.

49 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Turkish Affairs Desk 1958-1963*, FY 61 Defense Support for Turkey, August 30, 1960, Box 2, Secret.

50 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Memorandum of Conversation, August 2, 1960, X, p. 866.

51 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Memorandum of Conversation, August 2, 1960, X, p. 868.

52 *FRUS 1958-1960*, Letter From the Ambassador to Turkey to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, August 11, 1960, X, p. 878.

53 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Turkish Affairs Desk 1958-1963*, Request for L-3 Aircraft by General Cemal Gürsel, November 16, 1960, Box 1, Confidential.

emphasized. It was also stated that the US would continue collaborating closely with Türkiye in world politics.⁵⁴

The US policies towards Türkiye were effective in spreading the anti-Americanism that had been slowly developing since the 1960s. Events such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Johnson letter, and the poppy problem increased anti-Americanism in Türkiye. This opposition began to manifest itself in protests against American individuals and institutions in Türkiye from 1970 onwards. At the peak of the crisis, the Turkish army again intervened in politics on March 12, 1971. Under the threat of a coup, the government was forced to resign and a new technocratic cabinet was formed under the strict observation of the army.

Even if March 12 was not a coup in the classical sense, it resulted in the fall of an elected government through military intervention. For this reason, the US approach to this intervention is noteworthy. Interestingly, the US approach, which was not visible in other coups, was quite evident for March 12. The telephone conversation between National Security Advisor Kissinger and President Nixon on the morning of March 13 shows the US approach to the military involvement in Türkiye. In this phone conversation, Henry Kissinger informed the President that the military has thrown out the Turkish Prime Minister and that they are trying to form a new government. In response to President Nixon's "Is it on our side?" question, Kissinger answered "yes".⁵⁵ The position of the US towards the military ultimatum that led to the resignation of the Demirel cabinet in Türkiye is best expressed in these words. The events that followed the ultimatum revealed that March 12 was, in fact, on the US side.⁵⁶

The US policy towards the "friendly" intervention of the Turkish military was again supportive. In a telegram sent to Washington on March 13, 1971, the US Ambassador to Ankara Handley warned the Department of State to be cautious in commenting on the developments in Türkiye. According to Handley, "Any public comment on the developments should be confined to an expression of gratification that Türkiye is attempting to form a new government..."⁵⁷ This approach of the Turkish Ambassador indicates that the US will not take a position against the memorandum in Türkiye.

The Intelligence brief of the Department of State dated March 12, 1971, evaluates the military ultimatum and clarifies the US position vis-à-vis the military intervention

54 NARA, RG 59, *Records of the Turkish Affairs Desk 1958-1963*, Ninth Cento Ministerial Council Session Ankara Background Paper, April 17, 1961, Box 4 Secret.

55 DNSA, *Kissinger Telephone Conversations*, United States Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 13.03.1971, [http:// www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com) (Online, June 9, 2023)

56 For the detailed account of US gains from March 12, 1971 memorandum see Özata M. "Türkiye deki Askeri Müdahaleler ve ABD Kazanımları 12 Mart ve 12 Eylül Örneği", *Demokrasi Darbeler ve Tepkiler*, Ed. Betül Karagöz Yerdelen et al, Divan Kitap, Ankara 2016, pp. 683-703

57 NARA, RG59, *Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973*, Telegram From AmEmbassy in Ankara to The Secretary of State, 13.03.1971, Box 2637, Secret.

in Turkiye. The briefing excluded any details about the forced resignation of the democratically elected government. The US's position was to overcome the discontent of Americans living in Turkiye. As stated in the intelligence report, the main concern was the transition to a government that would crack down on a group of a few hundred people involved in violence.⁵⁸ As the Political Counselor of the American Embassy Myles Greene put it some thirty years later "*on the political side we were not too concerned about the overthrow of Demirel but we liked Erim. We liked somebody trying to crack down leftist students...*"⁵⁹

Before the 12 March Memorandum anti-Americanism was a major problem for the US in its relations with Turkiye. The military supervised the Erim government and was bitter enough to curb leftist activities rapidly. The martial law regime suppressed anti-American sentiment in the country and allowed the Sixth Fleet of the US Navy to visit Istanbul in peace in 1972. Under the strict control of the army, the Erim government did not hesitate to increase its relations with the US. Turkiye's relations with the US were said to have been restored under the Erim government, according to a telegram sent from Istanbul to Washington at the beginning of 1972. The cable also states that the US should exercise caution and refrain from abruptly stepping up its presence in the nation.⁶⁰

Another indication of US support for March 12 is the financial aid it allocated to Turkiye during this period. Shortly after the Erim government took office, US President Nixon approved a \$40 million aid package for Turkiye.⁶¹ This aid was important for the survival of the Erim government, which was not very popular at home but was trying to fix the problems in relations with the US. It is also stated that the US Government wants to get off to a good start with Prime Minister Erim, who has reaffirmed Turkiye's strong ties to NATO.

After the election held in October 1973, Turkiye resumed civilian rule. The second half of the 1970s witnessed short-lived and weak governments in the political arena. The first government formed after the election was the RPP-NSP (National Salvation Party) coalition with Ecevit as the Prime Minister. Ecevit achieved gaining the appreciation of the masses with his decisions on issues such as Cyprus and the poppy problem. He wanted to crown this success with early elections and a single-party government. However, although he increased his votes, he did not have the majority in the parliament to form a government on his own.

58 NARA, RG59, *Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973*, Director of Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Brief From INR (Ray S. Cline) To The Secretary, 12.03.1971, Box 2637, Secret / No Foreign Dissem.

59 Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Interview With Myles Greene, 22.02.2002, *ADST, Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. (Online <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000451/>, March 26, 2023)

60 NARA, RG59, *Subject Numeric Files 1970-1973*, Department of State Airgram From Amconsul Istanbul to Department of State, January 26, 1972, Box 2637, Confidential.

61 *FRUS 1969-1976*, Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, 26.04.1971, XXIX, p. 1090.

Taking advantage of this, right-wing parties came together and formed a series of coalition governments called as *Milliyetçi Cephe* (Nationalist Front).

Between 1975 and 1978 the Nationalist Front Governments aimed to prevent the RPP from returning to power, which they saw as an imminent danger to the rising leftist politics in Türkiye. It did not take long for this polarization in politics to be reflected on the streets. An economic crisis accompanied by conflict between the right and left groups paved the way for a new political crisis in Türkiye. The violence that began to escalate in the second half of the 1970s took on the appearance of a civil war by 1979, with dozens of people being killed every day. Despite the powers given to the Turkish army by the Demirel government to suppress the violence, the events continued unabated. The political and economic crisis deepened with the failure to elect a new president to replace the outgoing President Fahri Korutürk.

Türkiye could not be a stable ally for the US due to its weak governments during this period. The major problems for the US, such as the Iranian Revolution and the invasion of Afghanistan, increased the importance of Türkiye. In this turmoil, the Turkish army intervened again and overthrew the government. The code name of the coup was Bayrak Operation.

On September 12, the Turkish military carried out a long-planned move and staged a coup against Demirel government. Up until the November 1983 general elections, the nation was governed by the National Security Council (NSC), which consisted of the Chief of Staff and the four commanders in chief of the armed forces. By a decree of the NSC, the constitution was suspended, the parliament was dissolved, political parties were shut down, trade union activities were stopped, and military personnel were appointed to the positions of mayor and governor, referring to the military's total control over the country.

As in May 27th, in the September 12th coup, the US was well aware of the coup that was about to occur. Before the coup, reports from both the intelligence services and diplomatic missions warned of an impending coup in Türkiye. The US, the stronghold of democracy, turned a blind eye to a democracy's step-by-step descent into a coup d'état.

An intelligence memorandum prepared by the CIA on March 9, 1980, states that political, economic, and internal security problems have impelled military leaders to become more involved in the political process.⁶² In a telegram dated July 19, 1979, US Ambassador to Ankara Spiers stated that if the political and economic situation continued to deteriorate, the military could seize power for the third time. Spiers added the failure of Türkiye's politicians to find solutions to deep-seated economic and social problems has created dissatisfaction

62 *FRUS 1977-1980*, Short Term Prospects for Turkey, March 09, 1980, XXI, pp. 453-454

among senior military officers.⁶³ His successor, Spain, also had the same idea. Three months before the coup, the US Ambassador to Ankara Spain, mentioned that a coup in Turkiye was inevitable.⁶⁴ Ambassador Spain was also aware of the impending coup. An American officer informed Spain about the coup on September 11, as Ambassador Spain wrote in his memoirs.⁶⁵ Similarly, Alfred Joseph White, who worked in the U.S. Embassy's in Ankara, noted that on September 12, the officials at the embassy called his home before the coup had taken place and told him not to come to work.⁶⁶ These events show that although the US knew the coup was coming, it did not interrupt it because the coup was not a threat to US interests.⁶⁷

On the same day, September 12, US National Security Council member Paul Henze wrote a memorandum for Brzezinski and argued that the coup was a positive development, it had nothing to do with anti-American/NATO sentiment, and the US should not publicly criticize the takeover.⁶⁸ The first US official statement, issued only hours after the takeover, was carefully couched in understanding tones as Secretary of State Cristopher stated in his telegraph to Ankara.⁶⁹ In his first statement on the coup, the US State Department spokesperson John Trattner announced that the troops, led by the Chief of Staff, had taken control of the country, the situation in the country was calm, and the American citizens and property were not in danger. As a spokesman, Trattner did not hesitate to say that the Turkish military had intervened to restore a functioning democratic government. Trattner added "*Turkiye's other NATO allies and friends, have provided significant levels of assistance to help stabilize its economy and provide for the common defense. This assistance will continue.*"⁷⁰ A two-paragraph statement not only recognized the coup regime in Turkiye but also justified the reasons for the coup and highlighted that aid would continue. Christopher thinks that this quick action of the US muted possible adverse public reactions in some capitals. The US also

63 *FRUS 1977-1980*, Prospects for Military Intervention, 19.07.1979, XXI, p. 434

64 James W. Spain, *American Diplomacy in Turkey : Memoirs of an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary*, Praeger Publishers, New York 1984, p. 26

65 *Ibid.*, p.17.

66 Frontline Diplomacy: The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, Interview With Alfred Joseph White, 17.09.1997, *ADST, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division*, Washington, D.C., Digital ID: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004whi01> (Online, 16 March, 2023).

US Ambassador to Ankara, James W. Spain, also wrote that he received a call around 3 a.m. from General Dick Boehm, who was on the Military Assistance and Training Commission. (James W. Spain, *American Diplomacy in Turkey : Memoirs of an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary*, Praeger Publishers, New York 1984, p.18).

67 Mehmet Akif Okur, "Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin 12 Eylül Kavşağı: Amerikan Belgeleri Darbe Hakkında Ne Anlatıyor?", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, X/40 (2014), p. 86

68 *Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material*, Country File, Box 75, Turkey: 9/80-1/81.

69 *FRUS 1977-1980*, Telegram From Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey, September 20, 1980, XXI, p. 474.

70 *The Department of State Bulletin*, LXXX/2044, (November 1980) U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1980, p.5.

put a lot of effort in NATO to prevent the cancelation of the “Anvil Express” exercise and to back Türkiye’s stance at the Military Committee meeting in Türkiye, which was originally planned for September 15.⁷¹

After the initial support and statements of recognition, the US administration constantly reminded the military regime of its support through high-level visits to Ankara. In his visit to Ankara, Senator John G. Tower expressed the need for more American military and economic aid for Türkiye. Tower was The Chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, and the words of support came as a welcome buttress to the military leadership, which has come under attack by the Council of Europe for alleged abuses of human rights.⁷² Likewise, the Secretary of Defense, Caspar W. Weinberger, visited Türkiye as the first senior of the Reagan administration. Weinberger’s visit was seen as a welcome support for the military regime, which was having severe tensions with its European allies.⁷³ The visit of the US Secretary of State followed Weinberger’s visit. Alexander M. Haig visited Ankara and his visit is seen as a move by the US to strike a new and close relationship beyond the existing good ties within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.⁷⁴ With these high-level visits, the US restored relations with its forgotten ally. The 1979 Iranian Revolution and the USSR invasion of Afghanistan reminded Türkiye’s importance in the defense of the West. For this reason, despite the September 12 coup in Türkiye, the US signed a DECA (Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement) with Türkiye and put it into effect.⁷⁵ With these diplomatic steps, the US constantly emphasized its confidence in the regime and helped to break the military regime’s isolation in the international arena.

Military rule was also supported economically by the US. Türkiye’s foreign debt payments were postponed and restructured on favorable terms. Only about one month later the coup, the US rescheduled Turkish debts. The \$350 million debts owed by Türkiye were postponed with an agreement between the US and Türkiye, Türkiye was given a five-year grace period, after which it had 10 years to repay debts. ⁷⁶ Apparently, the US constantly emphasized its confidence in the regime through high-level visits and official statements. The US was also determined to provide economic aid to Türkiye. As the US Secretary of State underlined, “the restrained and supportive attitude of the U.S. toward the new Turkish government speaks for

71 *FRUS 1977-1980*, Telegram From Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey ,September 20,1980, XXI, p. 474.

72 Marvine Howe, “Senator Tower Favors More Assistance for the Turkish Junta”, *The New York Times*, February 13,1981, p. 8.

73 Marvine Howe, “Turks Reassured by Weinberger’s Visit”, *The New York Times*, Dec 5, 1981, p. 3.

74 Marvine Howe, “Haig Ankara Visit Encourages Turks”, *The New York Times*, December 13, 1982, p. 17.

75 Aylin Güney. “Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, XLIV/3 (2008), p. 476.

76 “Around the World”, *The New York Times*, Oct 26,1980, p. 5

itself".⁷⁷ The political and economic support of the US to the September 12 regime enabled the dictatorial regime in Turkiye to continue on its way with confidence for more than 3 years. The US Ambassador to Ankara James Spain, made it clear that they supported the economic policies of the military government regardless of what was happening politically in Turkiye during this period.⁷⁸

The US, which defends democracy and the parliamentary system at every opportunity, welcomed the coup in Turkiye with sympathy. The statements emphasized the soldiers' belief in democracy and their plans to end anarchy and restore peace to the country rather than the dismissal of the elected Prime Minister of Turkiye. After September 12, many reports prepared for the US Congress implied that the coup in Turkiye was necessary due to the political and economic crisis in the country. In all of these reports, the coup in Turkiye was referred to as a "military intervention" and the military's commitment to democracy was emphasized.

Conclusion

This study focused on the US policy towards the Turkish experiment with democracy between the years 1945 and 1980. Based on the Department of State documents in the US archive, it is seen that the US did not play an active role in the transition to multi-party life in Turkiye. The main reason for the increased US interest in Turkiye was not Turkiye's democratization but its strategic position. The growing tension between the US and the USSR after the Second World War increased Turkiye's importance. American military experts believe that Turkiye was the only country that could prevent Soviet influence from pouring into the Middle East. This strategic importance of Turkiye was the main reason behind the US support in the post-war period. Examining the congressional debates on aid to Turkiye, it is obvious that the US was trying to get closer to Turkiye for its strategic interests. With regards to American documents and the American press, the US did not pursue a policy of democratization in Turkiye. Instead, as the Truman administration emphasized, the discourse of democracy was used to protect US interests in the Middle East region; thus, the US Congress passed a resolution to provide aid to Turkiye.

After the establishment of multi-party life in Turkiye, Turkish democracy was interrupted by military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980. In general, once the military takeover succeeds in one country, the next crucial step is to obtain the support of external actors. In the Cold War period, the most important external actor was either the US or the USSR depending on

77 *FRUS 1977-1980*, Telegram From Secretary of State Muskie to the Department of State, September 27, 1980, XXI, p. 477.

78 James W. Spain, *American Diplomacy in Turkey: Memoirs of an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary*, Praeger Publishers, New York 1984, p. 73.

the side on which a country stands. In the example of coups in Türkiye, the most important actor was the US. The US support for the coups can be seen clearly through some indicators. First, the US government named the coup as a *military intervention* in Türkiye and continued providing political support as well as the military and economic aid. The US's supportive policy towards the coups in Türkiye is also a crystal clear example of the priority of stability. That is, stability is more important than democracy in American foreign policy.

The US, the most important defender of liberal democracy, remained silent against the overthrow of elected governments through military coups. The US support for military governments started with the naming of the coup and continued with the recognition of the new administration. In their statements, the US presidents and government spokespersons used the terms "military intervention" or "military action" instead of coup d'état. The US administration established close relations with the military governments and increased its military and economic aid.

Examining the historical approach of the US, which nowadays criticizes democracy and human rights in Türkiye, we see a clear contradiction. The US has not contributed to Türkiye's democratization and has been the biggest supporter of the military overthrowing civilian governments. According to the official records of the American Information Agency, the US provided the most assistance to Türkiye during the period when the military governments were in office. Increased military and economic aid facilitated the internal stabilization of the military governments. The declared purpose of US foreign aid is to promote democracy and protect and strengthen human rights. However, contrary to what is stated, what the US is paying for is the US national interest. As clearly seen in the democratic experience of Türkiye, US national security interests in the region often trump democracy or human rights concerns for policymakers. Promoting democracy and fostering human rights are useful instruments for American foreign policymakers. Records, telegrams, and reports from the US National Archives show that US interests have come before democratic ideals. It is more important for the US whether a government is cooperative than whether it is democratically elected.

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