

## The Alliance in the Storm: Geopolitical Representation of the United States in the Turkish Parliament during D tente

Ay e  m r Atmaca  
Hacettepe University

### Abstract

*This article analyzes how the geopolitical representation of the United States in Turkish political discourse changed during the 1960s and 1970s in the context of deep crises between the two countries, such as the Cyprus question, the opium issue, and the US arms embargo on T rkiye. Within the framework of critical geopolitical theory, it uses the concept of "geopolitical representation." It examines the changes in the geopolitical representation of the United States in Turkish political life through practical geopolitics. To this end, it evaluates the debates, speeches, and correspondence made by the representatives of the ruling and opposition parties and members of the government in the Turkish Grand National Assembly between 1964 and 1979, within the context of the crises in Turkish-American relations, particularly within the foreign policy framework. It is argued that while the alliance between T rkiye and the United States and T rkiye's membership in NATO were seen as important symbols of T rkiye's sovereignty and enjoyed unwavering support in the 1950s, tensions with the US, T rkiye's "strategic partner," in the 1960s and 1970s led to notable shifts in the Turkish parliament's narrative. As a pioneer of anti-NATO and anti-US rhetoric, the Workers' Party of T rkiye (TIP) played a prominent role in shaping parliamentary discussions.*

**Keywords:** Turkish-American relations, d tente, Cyprus question, US arms embargo, critical geopolitics

### 1. Introduction

The construction and reproduction of state identity over time is realized through the representational practices of state and non-state actors. This constitutes one of the significant factors influencing the foreign policy-making process. Therefore, analyzing such changes in the geopolitical representational practices of political elites can help to understand both a country's state identity construction and its foreign policy orientations in a certain period—in this case, those of T rkiye during the d tente era of the 1960s and 1970s.

Common perceptions of threat in the face of Cold War rivalries constituted the most important factor bringing T rkiye and the United States (US) closer together. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Turkish-American relations were not marred by difficulties. From Washington's point of view, T rkiye, as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and a country in a strategic position, was a crucial ally of the US against Soviet influence in the

eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Conversely, for Ankara, the US was a vital factor in ensuring Türkiye's security.<sup>1</sup> However, the relationship between the two countries, primarily established on grounds of security concerns during the Cold War, reached an impasse during the period of détente, due to domestic, regional, and international factors.

During the 1960s and 1970s, both countries faced significant challenges, including but not limited to the removal of Jupiter missiles from Türkiye, concerns regarding opium, the Johnson Letter, Türkiye's military intervention in Cyprus in 1974 to protect the Turkish Cypriot community and the subsequent US arms embargo have all been recognized as significant milestones in the alliance.<sup>2</sup> The Johnson Letter and the arms embargo contributed to a rise of anti-American sentiment in Türkiye, prompting the country to independently terminate the 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) and various associated agreements. Additionally, Türkiye declared that all US facilities within its borders would be placed under "provisional status."<sup>3</sup>

The era of détente had a significant impact on regional dynamics, particularly in the Middle East. During this period, Türkiye and the US faced numerous challenges in the region. One notable example was Türkiye's refusal to allow the US to use its military bases to support Israel during the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973.<sup>4</sup> Despite these tensions, relations improved, particularly in the 1980s, as détente came to an end and the "Second Cold War"<sup>5</sup> unfolded internationally.

Based on this backdrop, this article seeks to answer how the geopolitical representation of the United States in Turkish political discourse evolved during the détente period and what impact this evolution had on Turkish foreign policy decisions, particularly in the context of major crises such as the Cyprus conflict, the opium issue, and the US arms embargo. Following critical geopolitical theory, the concept of "geopolitical representation" is used in this study. Tuathail and Agnew argue that geopolitical representations are narratives created and used by powerful actors to frame international issues in ways that justify their policies and actions. They emphasize that these narratives are not neutral; they are actively constructed using political language, imagery, and symbols to represent the world in particular ways. Such representations shape perceptions of issues and influence policy decisions and international relations on the global stage.<sup>6</sup> According to Mamadouh and Dijkink, "Geopolitical representations become more explicit but also more divisive when important decisions have to be taken or a crisis occurs."<sup>7</sup> They also add that "Major changes in the geopolitical context generally bring the reformulation of geopolitical visions, a re-articulation of geographical representations that is necessary to acknowledge and justify

<sup>1</sup> Ayşe Ömür Atmaca, "The Geopolitical Origins of Turkish-American Relations: Revisiting the Cold War Years," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 3, no. 1 (2014): 20.

<sup>2</sup> Çağrı Erhan, "ABD ve NATO'yla İlişkiler," in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olaylar, Belgeler, Yorumlar Cilt I: 1919-1980*, ed. Baskın Oran, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001); Mustafa Taner, "Swinging Pendulum of Turkish-American Defense Relations: From the Opium Crisis to Intensified Military Cooperation, 1971-1989," in *Turkish-American Relations since 1783*, eds. Tuğba Ünlü Bilgiç, Bestami S. Bilgiç (London: Lexington Books, 2023), 59.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Stern, *The Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of the American Diplomacy* (New York: Times Books, 1977), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 426.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (2nd edition), (London: Verso, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, "Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy," *Political Geography* 11, no. 2 (1992): 194.

<sup>7</sup> Virginie Mamadouh and Gertjan Dijkink, "Geopolitics, International Relations and Political Geography: The Politics of Geopolitical Discourse," *Geopolitics* 11, no. 3 (2006) 357.

foreign policy changes.”<sup>8</sup> Such representational practices can be studied through the foreign policy discourse of state officials, academic/semi-academic analyses, writings and speeches of politicians and journalists, geopolitical discourses of various political actors, and even popular media.

Tuathail and Dalby propose a division of geopolitics into three distinct but interconnected areas: formal geopolitics; practical geopolitics; and popular geopolitics. This categorization aims to understand how geopolitical knowledge and discourses are produced, disseminated, and consumed at different levels of society. Formal geopolitics refers to the academic study and theorization of geopolitical issues, while practical geopolitics involves the application of this knowledge by policymakers, and popular geopolitics refers to its dissemination and interpretation through the media and public discourse. The aforementioned knowledge involves the scholarly work of academics, theorists, and researchers, who analyze global political arrangements, strategies, and outcomes. It often involves the publication of theories and models in academic journals, books, and conferences that contribute to the scholarly discourse on geopolitical issues. Practical geopolitics is concerned with the application of this knowledge by state actors and policymakers. This includes how leaders, governments, and military strategists use geopolitical concepts to make decisions, shape foreign policy, and justify their actions to domestic and international audiences. Practical geopolitics can be seen in the speeches of politicians, the formulation of state policies, and the implementation of diplomatic or military strategies. Popular geopolitics refers to the representation and perception of geopolitical issues in popular culture and the media. This includes how movies, television shows, news media, video games, and other cultural products represent international politics, conflicts, and crises.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, this study examines the changes in the geopolitical representation of the US in Turkish political life through practical geopolitics in order to understand how geopolitical knowledge and discourse are produced and disseminated at the state level. It does so by evaluating the debates, speeches, and correspondence made by the representatives of the ruling and opposition parties and members of the government in the Turkish Grand National Assembly between 1964 and 1979, within the framework of the crises in Turkish-American relations, especially in the context of foreign policy. Accordingly, it is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the developments in the 1960s and explains how the opposition to the US was conducted in the Turkish National Assembly under the leadership of the Workers’ Party of Türkiye (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP). The second part analyzes the debates in the parliament after the dissolution of the TİP in the 1970s. It is argued in this context that the TİP influenced the debates in the Turkish parliament by evaluating Türkiye’s relations with the US through dependency. These debates continued into the 1970s. The international conditions during the détente period of the Cold War and the deep crises between the two countries created an environment for a change in the geopolitical representation of the US in the Turkish parliament.

## 2. Alliance in Question

After World War II, Türkiye faced a challenging geopolitical landscape due to its proximity to the Soviet Union. The US administration became interested in Türkiye after the Soviet

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Gerardoid Ó Tuathail and Simon Dalby, *Rethinking Geopolitics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 4-5.

Union's territorial claims on the country in 1939.<sup>10</sup> This led to a cooperation between Washington and Ankara to counter the Soviet Union. Hence, it can be argued that the Turkish-American alliance originated based on deeply rooted ideological concerns.

In the 1950s, Turkish-American relations underwent significant transformations driven by shifting geopolitical dynamics and strategic imperatives. With the onset of the Cold War, Türkiye emerged as a crucial ally for the US in the containment of Soviet influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East region. The signing of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 solidified American support for Türkiye, positioning it as a “bulwark against communist expansionism.”<sup>11</sup> The subsequent implementation of the Marshall Plan provided Türkiye with substantial economic aid, facilitating its post-war reconstruction efforts and fostering closer ties with the US. Moreover, the establishment of NATO in 1949 further solidified the strategic partnership between Türkiye and the US, with Türkiye becoming a member of the alliance in 1952. Throughout the 1950s, military cooperation between the two deepened, as evidenced by the establishment of American military bases in Türkiye and the provision of military assistance to bolster Türkiye's defense capabilities.<sup>12</sup> As Uslu, Bilge Criss and Ünlü Bilgiç have all noted, the roots of anti-Americanism in Türkiye go back to the period between 1945 and 1960, fuelled in particular by public reaction to the aid agreement that followed the Truman Doctrine. These were the years that were initially marked as the golden years of Turkish-American relations. Critics of the time accused the government of making political and economic concessions to the US that were reminiscent of the infamous capitulations of the Ottoman period. There were fears that instead of becoming an equal ally, Türkiye was being downgraded to a US colony, with Turkish affairs managed to suit American rather than Turkish interests. Many also accused America of cultural imperialism. These feelings were particularly strong among left-wing groups, for whom the American presence was a negation of a sovereign and independent Türkiye.<sup>13</sup>

However, despite public opinion between 1947 and 1964, Turkish political elites, regardless of their party affiliation, supported Türkiye's relations with the US and especially its NATO membership in their parliamentary speeches, stressing that this relationship made Türkiye part of the “Western and free world” and that the US and NATO were seen as the “symbol” and “guarantee” of Türkiye's independence. During this period, there were no significant differences between the opposition and the government, especially on foreign policy issues. Members of Parliament from both the ruling and opposition parties stressed the importance of NATO and the US alliance for Türkiye, and almost all parliamentary speeches on foreign policy referred to the foreign policy of the Atatürk era and the principle of “peace

<sup>10</sup> Kamuran Gürün, *Türk-Sovyet İlişkileri: 1920-1953*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991), 276-311.

<sup>11</sup> Behlül Özkan argues that the Soviets did not “demand” territory or military bases from Turkey in 1945. The perceived Soviet threat was instrumental in rallying Turkish public support for a pro-Western foreign policy after World War II. In addition, this perceived threat served as a crucial tool for shaping domestic policy and suppressing dissent. Similarly, Melvyn Leffler asserts that, despite the rhetoric about Soviet expansionism toward the south, that the Soviet demands on Turkey included a significant defensive element. See; Behlül Özkan, “The 1945 Turkish-Soviet Crisis,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2020): 156-187; Melvyn P. Leffler, “Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952,” *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 4 (1985): 807-825.

<sup>12</sup> Ayşe Ömür Atmaca, “Old Game in a New World: Turkey and the United States from Critical Perspective,” (PhD diss. Middle East Technical University, 2011), 82.

<sup>13</sup> Nasuh Uslu, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri* (Ankara: 21. Yüzyıl Yayınları, 2000); Nur Bilge Criss, “A Short History of Anti-Americanism and Terrorism: The Turkish Case,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 472-482; Tuğba Ünlü Bilgiç, “The Roots of Anti-Americanism in Turkey, 1945-1960,” *Bilgi* 72 (2015). For a contemporary discussion on Anti-Americanism, see; Cem Birol, “Contractual Origins of Anti-Americanism: Pew 2013 Results,” *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 13, no. 2 (2024): 215-235.

at home, peace in the world.”

In 1962, following the Cuban missile crisis, the US removed Jupiter missiles from Türkiye without prior consultation with Ankara. This event marked a significant crisis in the relationship between Türkiye and the US.<sup>14</sup> Although the Turkish government representatives mildly and implicitly criticized the decision of the US to withdraw the Jupiter missiles from its territory without consulting them, there was no strong opposition to the alliance. This is likely due to the considerable military and economic aid Türkiye was receiving from Western countries, particularly the US owing to its membership in NATO. Government officials stated that the withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles was not related to the Cuban missile crisis. They claimed that the decision to withdraw the missiles had been made prior to the crisis and that the issue did not diminish Türkiye’s strategic importance. Instead, the decision was related to technological developments, and Jupiter missiles were replaced by Polaris submarines.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the Cold War was not a monolithic period. The golden years of the Türkiye and the US came to an end during the era of *détente*. The term “*détente*” was widely used in the 1960s and 1970s to describe the efforts made by the US, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies to improve diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations, in order to mitigate the intense ideological and military competition that characterized the Cold War.<sup>16</sup> The *détente* years also marked a pivotal period in Turkish political history characterized by significant socio-political transformations, ideological contestations, and state interventions. Following the military coup of 1960, Türkiye experienced a series of political upheavals, including the rise of left- and right-wing movements, student activism, and the consolidation of state power.

The 1960 military coup, led by the National Unity Committee (*Milli Birlik Komitesi*, MBK), overthrew the government of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes and initiated a period of military tutelage. A new constitution was adopted in 1961 and aimed to establish a more liberal and democratic political order, albeit under the watchful eye of the military. The emergence of new political actors, including the Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi*, AP) led by Süleyman Demirel, signaled a shift in Turkish politics towards competitive electoral contests.<sup>17</sup>

Changes in the world and in the Cold War conditions were reflected in the discourse of the Turkish political elite. The 1960s witnessed the emergence of diverse ideological currents and social movements that challenged the status quo and sought to articulate alternative visions for the Turkish society. Left-wing groups, inspired by Marxist and socialist ideologies, gained momentum, particularly among urban intellectuals, students, and workers. Organizations such as the TİP and Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Türkiye (*Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*, DİSK) mobilized support for radical social and political change, advocating for labor rights, land reform, and anti-imperialism.<sup>18</sup>

Conversely, right-wing forces, rooted in nationalist, conservative, and Islamist traditions, also exerted influence in Turkish politics. The rise of the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, MNP) and the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP) reflected the appeal of Islamic identity and traditional values among segments of the population. These

<sup>14</sup> Aylin Güney, “Anti-Americanism in Turkey: Past and Present,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2008): 472.

<sup>15</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* (3rd edition), (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 99-100.

<sup>16</sup> Mustafa Taner, “Swinging Pendulum of Turkish- American Defense Relations,” 59.

<sup>17</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 136-138.

<sup>18</sup> Meliha Benli Altunışık and Özlem Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 36.

movements sought to counter the perceived secularist and Westernizing tendencies of the state, positioning themselves as defenders of Turkish nationalism and Islamic heritage.<sup>19</sup>

The role of the military in Turkish politics remained paramount throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with successive coups in 1971 and 1980 reinforcing the influence of the armed forces. The military justified its interventions as necessary measures to preserve national unity, stability, and secularism, often intervening in response to perceived threats from left-wing or Islamist movements. However, the legacy of military tutelage also hindered the consolidation of democratic institutions and civil liberties, leading to cycles of political instability and repression.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the strategic alignment between Türkiye and the US, Turkish-American relations faced several diplomatic challenges and political tensions during the 1960s and 1970s. The rise of nationalist and leftist movements in Türkiye, coupled with periodic military interventions and political upheavals, strained the domestic political landscape, and tested the resilience of the bilateral partnership.

Furthermore, the presence of regional conflicts and geopolitical competition in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean added further complications to Turkish-American relations. The Cyprus conflict and related events, such as the Johnson Letter and the US arms embargo, created deep mistrust and suspicion between the US and Türkiye, straining relations throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The American response to Türkiye's military involvement in Cyprus in 1974 underscored the complex task of reconciling strategic objectives with international principles and norms, illustrating the nuanced dynamics inherent in Turkish-American relations.

In the 1960s, TİP and its chairman, Mehmet Ali Aybar, played a significant role in the anti-American discourse. National independence and anti-imperialism were among the themes that the deputies of TİP focused on in their speeches. In parliamentary speeches, national independence was predominantly defined through NATO membership and relations with the US. Furthermore, discussions of relations with the US often included a focus on anti-imperialism.

After the 1965 elections, the initial action of TİP involved submitting a written inquiry to the government. In this inquiry, TİP requested a list of documents signed between the US and the Turkish Republic, highlighting the unusual nature of the political relations between the two countries. İstanbul member of parliament Altan stated that 52 confidential bilateral agreements had been signed between the US and Türkiye, unbeknownst to the Parliament.<sup>21</sup> Turhan Feyzioğlu (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) acknowledged that while they did not necessarily agree with TİP's perspective, the issue warranted discussion in Parliament.<sup>22</sup> Prime Minister Demirel, under pressure from TİP and the public, clarified that none of the bilateral agreements had been finalized during the Justice Party's tenure. He refuted TİP's accusations of Türkiye being a puppet of the US, asserting that he had safeguarded Türkiye's interests by not allowing any alterations to existing agreements that would be detrimental to Türkiye's rights. He accused TİP of inciting nationalist sentiments by opposing NATO and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), arguing that these agreements were signed

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>20</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Politics and the Military*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 313-323.

<sup>21</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 7, Session 110 (13.07.1966), 695-696.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 702.

to fortify a collective defense against communism and that Türkiye had been sovereign and independent since its inception.<sup>23</sup>

TİP Chairman Aybar also frequently drew attention to Türkiye's membership in NATO, emphasized the Turkish War of Independence and Atatürk's foreign policy, and openly took a stance against the US. For example, at the General Executive Board meeting of his party on 15 July 1967, he said: "The American war budget is around 60 billion dollars. For 20 years, Türkiye has been included in this enormous machine of domination, exploitation, and war at the command of American imperialism. For twenty years Türkiye has been in the zone of influence of American imperialism. There are American military bases in Türkiye. There are military delegations. There are CIA games. And most of our armed forces are linked to the Pentagon through NATO."<sup>24</sup>

During that era, the Turkish left primarily focused on Türkiye's transition from favoring the West in the bipolar era to aligning with American imperialism. This shift marked a departure from the longstanding principles of neutrality and non-alignment upheld since the Republic's inception. Furthermore, Türkiye was failing to support oppressed nations and the Third World on an ideological level. This reliance on the US hindered Türkiye's efforts to democratize, preventing the internalization of democratic values and institutions despite its rapid integration with Western European entities. Instead of pursuing its own agenda, Türkiye was redirecting its resources, energy, savings, and time to fulfill NATO and US interests.<sup>25</sup>

The Cyprus question should also be analyzed in this context. As the Turkish government prepared to intervene in the island, a letter was sent by the US President Lyndon B. Johnson to Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in June 1964. The letter stated that a unilateral intervention by Türkiye in the island could lead to a war between the Turkish and Greek states and that it was unacceptable for the two, as both NATO members, to engage in a war. Johnson pointed out that Türkiye should consult its allies before taking a decision to intervene. He also suggested that this war could also lead to Soviet intervention in Türkiye and that NATO would be reluctant to defend it in such a situation. It was stated that the military equipment provided to Türkiye by the US would not be allowed to be used in this intervention.<sup>26</sup> The Johnson Letter was one of the reasons for Türkiye's withdrawal from the decision to intervene in 1964.

The attitude of the Turkish left in this period was also directly related to Atatürk's foreign policy. According to the leftists, NATO membership started a new period of colonization for Türkiye. Accordingly, they viewed the Cyprus problem, just like other issues, as a result of one-sided loyalty to the US and NATO. One of the tasks of NATO, as an imperialist occupation army, was seen as handing over of the island of Cyprus to Greece through Enosis and to continue its existence under the leadership of the West.<sup>27</sup>

Türkiye's excessive pro-American and pro-NATO attitude was seen as tying its hands and feet in the Cyprus issue and preventing Türkiye from achieving the desired results. From this point of view, the alliance with the US and NATO membership, which was considered

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 712-715.

<sup>24</sup> Mehmet Ali Aybar, *Bağımsızlık, Demokrasi, Sosyalizm*, (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1968), 579.

<sup>25</sup> Barış Doster, "Türkiye'de NATO Karşıtlığının Tarihsel ve Siyasal Kökenleri," *Orta Doğu Analiz* 4, no. 40 (2012): 33.

<sup>26</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson and İsmet İnönü, "President Johnson and Prime Minister İnönü: Correspondence between President Johnson and Prime Minister İnönü, June 1964, as released by the White House, January 15, 1966," *Middle East Journal* 20, no. 3 (1966): 386-393.

<sup>27</sup> Serpil Güvenç, "Socialist Perspectives on Foreign Policy Issues: The Case of TİP in 1960s," (Master's Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2005), 146, 152-154.

as one of the greatest achievements of Turkish foreign policy and as a symbol of Türkiye's "independence" in the first half of the 1960s, came to be considered as the most important sign of Türkiye's political and economic dependence on the US and NATO in the second half of the 1960s.

When the Johnson Letter was published in the newspapers on 13 January 1966 by Cüneyt Arcayürek,<sup>28</sup> it had a cold shower effect on Turkish public opinion and the Parliament. On the one hand, the Johnson Letter caused a serious increase in security concerns, and on the other hand, it led to a major identity crisis.

As mentioned above, the leftist groups, which had been explicitly opposing the government due to the democratic environment created by the 1961 Constitution, began to openly criticize the government over the Johnson Letter. On 5 January 1966, Tarık Ziya Ekinci, speaking on behalf of TİP in response to Parliament member Mehmet Altınsay's motion for a parliamentary investigation on Cyprus under Article 88 of the Constitution, stated that there was no legitimate government in Cyprus due to the government's violation of the treaties, and demanded that this should be declared by the government. He said that if Türkiye was attacked by Greece because of the Cyprus issue, NATO would not be on Türkiye's side and therefore the foreign policy should be revised and that TİP's solution to the Cyprus issue was based on peace. He also remarked:

In addition, we sincerely wish that the Cyprus problem should be resolved peacefully and within the principles of peace. In order to achieve this, we call upon the parties directly concerned with Cyprus, namely Türkiye, Greece, and the representatives of the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities in Cyprus, to negotiate this issue at a round table conference in the presence of the United Nations Representative and to find a favorable solution to this issue. However, I believe that if they do not want to engage in such negotiations, and if they go in a direction that violates the treaties, and if our Union or our compatriots there are violated, we should definitely know and definitely decide that this will be considered as an act of war.<sup>29</sup>

On 2 February 1966, Urfa member of parliament, Behice Boran, speaking on behalf of TİP at the parliamentary session, demanded an investigation into how the letters had been leaked to the press. Boran stated that the Johnson Letter contained issues such as independence, sovereignty, the functioning of NATO, and vital issues such as the weapons purchased through bilateral agreements. That İnönü could not respond to this foreign intervention with the firmness they expected, was disappointing. Boran also said that the Johnson Letter made it clear that the NATO alliance would not protect Türkiye from a possible Soviet attack, and that NATO was defending US interests, not collective security. She therefore called for a return to Atatürk's foreign policy of not allowing any foreign influence and not entering into military alliances. Muzaffer Karan, who spoke on behalf of TİP during the budget negotiations, stated that Türkiye's relations with NATO and the US should be reconsidered.<sup>30</sup>

In this context, another problem related to the alliance with the US was the US/NATO bases in Türkiye. In the parliament, TİP opposed national independence and anti-imperialism on the axis of the US and the military bases established in Türkiye, and TİP Chairman Aybar, on behalf of the TİP group, criticized the government program read out by Süleyman Demirel on foreign policy. He said that after the death of Atatürk, Türkiye had quickly fallen under the

<sup>28</sup> Cüneyt Arcayürek, "İşte Johnson'un Mektubu," *Hürriyet*, January 13, 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 2, Session 31 (05.01.1966), 231.

<sup>30</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 2, Session 40 (02.02.1966), 530-531.



influence of the West and that this contradicted Kemalism, and he made striking statements about the US bases as follows:

(...) Today, 35 million square meters of land in Türkiye are under the sovereignty of the US. (...) No citizen, no matter what position he occupies in the state, can set foot on these lands, which have been turned into bases of the American state by bilateral agreements, without the permission of the Americans. Turkish policemen, Turkish officers, Turkish commanders, Turkish judges, Turkish deputies, Turkish ministers cannot enter the American bases in our country. The planes and missiles that take off from these bases, without our knowledge and without the approval of the Grand Assembly, can expose our country to grave dangers at any time. The American military and civilian personnel in our country enjoy privileges similar to diplomatic immunity. Our judicial independence and freedom, which is one of the basic elements of national independence, is being violated before our eyes.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, on this issue, Karan claimed that NATO and US personnel working in these bases were exempt from Turkish laws and that this situation casted a shadow over Türkiye's independence: France opposes this stance because it believes that NATO's thermo-nuclear weapons will be used for American purposes. Norway and Denmark, although NATO states, have not authorized the establishment of bases on their territory. There is not a single American soldier on the territory of these states.<sup>32</sup>

In their speeches on foreign policy, TİP deputies emphasized the importance of cooperation with Third World countries instead of the American alliance. According to them, the alliance with the US and Türkiye's membership of NATO had a great impact on the failure to solve the Cyprus problem in Türkiye's favor. On the one hand, NATO membership prevented Türkiye from acting independently in the Cyprus issue and on the other hand, it caused Türkiye to lose the support of the Third World countries. Furthermore, Türkiye's once inspiring image, earned through its successful war of liberation, has been tarnished by its affiliation with NATO and its subordination to American authority. Therefore, during the negotiations on the resolution of the Cyprus problem in the United Nations, it was said that Türkiye had not received the support of these countries and was left alone in solving the problem, and it was argued that relations with the Third World countries should be developed instead of NATO.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, the speeches of TİP deputies in and out of the parliament during this period represent a significant change of geopolitical representation of the United States in Turkish political discourse. While in the 1950s, the US and NATO were the biggest symbols of Türkiye's independence and its Western and democratic character, after 1965, NATO became a symbol and even an instrument of Türkiye's one-sided dependence on the "imperialist" US, especially in the context of Cyprus. TİP parliamentarians did what no other political party had done before and questioned Türkiye's relations with the West, especially with the US. This anti-American and anti-NATO opposition of TİP in parliament had a practical counterpart, of course. In 1967, when the CHP was the main opposition party during the first Demirel government, it set up a commission to discuss NATO membership and the report it produced discussed the disadvantages of the Atlantic Alliance.

The international youth movement's stance towards the Vietnam War contributed to the growth of anti-American and anti-NATO sentiments in Türkiye. In 1967 and 1968, protests against NATO, the US, and the 6th Fleet persisted in the country without interruption. Among

<sup>31</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 1, Session 7 (07.11.1965), 176.

<sup>32</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 4, Session 55 (24.02.1966), 469.

<sup>33</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 2, Volume 2, Session 28 (27.12.1965), 27-33.

the young people who attacked the leftist youth responsible for throwing the American sailors into the sea and even went so far as to pray in front of the US ships moored in Dolmabahçe, there were many names who became prominent in right-wing politics in the following years, serving as MPs and ministers. In 1969, in an event that went down in history as “Bloody Sunday,” the attack by nationalist, conservative and theocratic youth on the left-wing students’ protest against the famous US 6th Fleet enabled the socialists to once again expose the relations of the Turkish right with the US and NATO.<sup>34</sup>

As Türkiye entered the 1970s with foreign and domestic crises, it was shaken again by the military memorandum of 12 March 1971. As a result of the decisions taken after the memorandum, TİP was dissolved in 1972 and its leaders were arrested.<sup>35</sup> Although TİP lost its voice in the Parliament after the 1971 memorandum, the alliance with the US and the NATO issue continued to be discussed in Parliament in the 1970s, arguably due to TİP’s having frequently raised its opposing views over the previous years.

The Cyprus issue, opium crisis, military bases, NATO’s flexible defense policy and the 1975 arms embargo imposed by the US were the hottest foreign policy issues debated in the Parliament. Although Türkiye had not intervened in the island in the 1960s, the Turkish government intervened militarily in Cyprus in July 1974. The second Cyprus crisis in 1974 marked a new era in Turkish-American relations. With the impact of the détente between the two superpowers and the strong anti-American feeling in the country after the Cyprus crisis, Türkiye, for the first time, wanted to reduce its dependency on the US and improve its relations with the Soviet Union. As then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit put it: “... the sources of imminent threat to Türkiye have changed considerably in recent years. Türkiye does not see the Soviet Union as a threat.”<sup>36</sup>

In fact, although the US administration opposed the arms embargo by emphasizing Türkiye’s geopolitical importance, it began to impose an arms embargo on Türkiye as a result of the decision taken by the US Congress on 5 February 1975. Türkiye’s first reaction to this embargo was to declare the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus on 13 February 1975. Later, Prime Minister Ecevit decided to lift the opium ban, freeze the status of US bases, and cancel the 1969 defense treaty with the US. Following the election of Jimmy Carter as the US President, the arms embargo was lifted in October 1978.<sup>37</sup>

The impact of the US arms embargo on Turkish politics was profound. Türkiye, which was almost entirely dependent on NATO and the US for its defense industry, felt almost completely defenseless in economic and security terms. Economic and military cooperation agreements, previously seen as a great success, were now seen as the cause of a failing economy and political instability.

The economic burden caused by the arms embargo, the US military support to Greece while imposing an arms embargo on Türkiye, and the bases issues were among the most important issues on the agenda of the subsequent parliamentary meetings. For example, on 17 February 1976, Cevat Önder, a member of Parliament from the Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti*, DP), declared that foreign policy was in crisis, and openly criticized the

<sup>34</sup> Güney, “Anti-Americanism in Turkey,” 474.

<sup>35</sup> Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2011), 90.

<sup>36</sup> Bülent Ecevit, “Turkey’s Security Policies,” *Survival* 20, no. 5 (1978): 203.

<sup>37</sup> Baskın Oran (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt 1: 1919-1980*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), 708-711.

government over NATO, the US arms embargo, and bases. On the other hand, he asked whether the Nationalist Front government was approaching the Communist bloc as a reaction to the West.<sup>38</sup> On 20 February 1976, Fehmi Cumalioğlu, speaking on behalf of the MSP group, stated that Türkiye's membership in NATO and CENTO was approved by the MSP group and that they believed that the NATO alliance retained its value. Describing the US Congress's decision on the arms embargo as "hostile behavior that is incompatible with the rules of friendship and alliance," Cumalioğlu said that the government had approached the decision with restraint.<sup>39</sup>

In a softer tone, Adana MP Mehmet Can, speaking on behalf of the CHP, accused NATO of supporting Greece, and described Türkiye's position in NATO as "not very positive." Describing Türkiye as "the cheapest guardian of NATO's southern flank," Can said that Türkiye was not considered European in this context. Can stressed that instead of proposing to leave NATO, relations with NATO and the US should be reviewed and any gaps should be filled, the alliances should be put on a new platform, and the number of Turkish forces in the NATO alliance should be reduced.<sup>40</sup>

However, these criticisms were more cautious on the government side. Speaking on behalf of the Republican Reliance Party (*Cumhuriyetçi Güven Partisi*, CGP), Konya MP Vefa Tanır said that they valued the NATO alliance and believed that it would continue to maintain its value. He said that the embargo was incompatible with friendship, but that it had been responded to with the closing of the bases.<sup>41</sup> Defense Minister Ferid Melen, who took the floor next, said that the government believed that NATO maintained its value, but that it had to accept the withdrawal of Greece from NATO's military wing, and that the arms embargo had led to a weakness in NATO's southern wing.<sup>42</sup>

On 22 February 1976, during discussions on the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Esat Işık, speaking on behalf of the CHP group, stated that Turkish-Greek relations were at the root of the problems in foreign policy and accused the government of having remained silent for too long. According to Işık, the closure of the bases was nothing but a show of strength.<sup>43</sup> Özer Ölçmen of the DP group, who spoke after Işık, said that the debate on NATO membership was no longer a monopoly of the left and that the government was hiding the truth from the nation.<sup>44</sup> Foreign Minister İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil then took the floor and said that it should be discussed whether the conditions that led to the creation of NATO still exist or not, but that all previous governments, including the CHP, which was the most critical of NATO at the time, did not think of leaving NATO. On the issue of military bases, Çağlayangil stressed that from now on there would be no dual facilities, but only Turkish facilities managed by Türkiye.<sup>45</sup>

The end of détente and the beginning of the "Second Cold War" between the US and the Soviet Union, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution in 1979, once again strengthened the Turkish-American alliance. It is important to note that the military intervention in Türkiye on 12 September 1980 did not have a negative impact

<sup>38</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 4, Volume 15, Session 58 (17.02.1976), 196.

<sup>39</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 4, Volume 15, Session 61 (20.02.1976), 690.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 693.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 709.

<sup>43</sup> Millet Meclisi, *Tutanak Dergisi*, Term 4, Volume 16, Session 63 (22.02.1976), 252-253.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-271.

on the relationship. After the military coup, unlike Türkiye's European allies, the US did not criticize the military government. The US confirmed that American aid to Türkiye would not be interrupted. As a result, Türkiye began to change its foreign policy, taking into account American sensitivities. Consequently, Türkiye withdrew its veto on Greece's accession to the military wing of NATO. On 29 March 1980, Türkiye and the US signed a new Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement (DECA).<sup>46</sup> The DECA negotiations aimed to maintain a strong Turkish-American bilateral defense relationship and preserve US military facilities in Türkiye. As a result, the Turkish-American Defense Council was established in 1981. The level of US military aid during this period was the highest ever, except for the Korean War era.

### 3. Conclusion

Türkiye's aspiration to integrate into the West was institutionalized through its NATO membership and alliance with the US after World War II. The nation's desire to be included in the free and democratic world was acknowledged, and its political, economic, and security concerns were addressed through the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and membership in NATO and the Council of Europe during the Cold War.

The Turkish-American alliance and Türkiye's NATO membership were seen as crucial symbols of Türkiye's independence, receiving unconditional support in the 1950s. However, crises with the US, Türkiye's "strategic ally," during the 1960s and 1970s led to significant changes in its geopolitical representation of the United States in the Turkish Parliament.

Critical geopolitics argues that state identity is constructed and reproduced over time through representational practices of state and non-state actors. This is a crucial factor that influences the foreign policy-making process. Therefore, analyzing changes in the representational practices of political elites helps us understand Türkiye's state identity construction and foreign policy orientations during this period.

While the anti-American and anti-NATO discourse that grew as a result of the crises of the 1960s and 1970s, which were defined as "national issues," highlighted Türkiye's dependence on the US and NATO, it was TİP that pioneered this discourse in parliament in the 1960s. Therefore, TİP held a significant position in guiding the debates in parliament as the pioneer of the anti-NATO and anti-US discourse. Looking back at the 1970s, it is evident that TİP's discourse broke the taboo of speaking out against NATO and the alliance with the US. This discourse was subsequently adopted by other political parties, albeit in different tones. It is noteworthy that only opposition parties voiced the anti-American discourse, while the ruling parties defended NATO membership, albeit with cautious criticism. Following the Cyprus crisis, representatives of the ruling parties spoke cautiously in defense of the Turkish-American alliance and Türkiye's NATO membership, without the unconditional commitment of the 1950s. The major foreign policy crises of the détente period, such as the Cyprus crisis and the arms embargo, affected Türkiye's perception of the US and NATO, leading governments to seek alternatives in the economic, security, and foreign policy fields.

In the 1970s, the practical implications of the dependence/independence dichotomy were most evident through the Cyprus Operation, lifting the opium prohibition and regulating powers and responsibilities over US bases. During this period, the ruling parties attempted to improve relations with the USSR, which was seen as a potential threat by some and an

<sup>46</sup> Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), 104-105.

alternative by others. They also aimed to create a foreign policy discourse that was both “Western” and “non-Westernist.” However, during this period and the subsequent Cold War, Türkiye had no alternative to the US and NATO, both economically and in terms of security.

During the détente period of the Cold War, Türkiye experienced crises with NATO allies Greece and the US. Additionally, the country diversified its democratic representation, which led to increased criticism of the US. Despite this criticism, the US remained a reliable security ally for the ruling political parties due to the economic conditions during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as Türkiye’s founding philosophy of aligning itself with the West. It can be argued that the notion that Türkiye is obligated to pursue a “multilateral foreign policy,” frequently voiced during the Özal, Cem, and Davutoğlu eras, has its roots in the change of the US’s geopolitical representation in Turkish political discourse during the 1960s and 1970s.

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