

The American Geopolitical Interests and Turkey on the Eve of the September 12, 1980 Coup

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ÖZ

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Carter yönetiminin Türkiye'deki askeri darbe ile ilişkisinin doğası, 12 Eylül 1980 darbesi hakkında sık gündeme gelen sorular arasında yer almaktadır. Washington'un darbeye verdiği desteğin önemli motivasyonları hakkındaki sorular, o döneme ait jeopolitik kaygılara odaklanmaktadır. ABD'nin Türkiye'den, Yunanistan'ın NATO'nun askeri kanadına dönüşüne izin vermesi talebi ile İran Devrimi ve Sovyetlerin Afganistan'ı işgali gibi önemli gelişmelerin Ortadoğu'daki güç dengesinde meydana getirdiği ciddi değişimlere, literatürde işaret edilmektedir. Nitekim çalışmamızda da, 12 Eylül 1980 darbesinin meydana geldiği tarihsel konjonktürün parçası olan bu meselelere, Ortadoğu'da meydana gelen jeopolitik belirsizliğin çözümü için gerekli oyunculardan biri olarak Türkiye'yi gören Amerikan politika yapımcıları tarafından en üst düzeydeki öncelikler olarak yaklaşıldığı hususu resmi belgelere dayanılarak gösterilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler. 12 Eylül 1980 Darbesi, Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri, Ortadoğu, Soğuk Savaş, İran Devrimi

ABSTRACT

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Since the 1980's one of the key questions which has been repeatedly asked about the September 12, 1980 coup in Turkey is the nature of the relation of Carter

administration to the military takeover in Turkey. The focus of the questions about the major motives of Washington's support for the Coup is over the geopolitical concerns of the time. U.S.' demands from Turkey to allow the reintegration of Greece to NATO's military wing and the changes in the balance of power in the Middle East following two significant developments, namely the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which have been widely debated through the literature. In this article, it is shown that those issues which were part of the historical conjuncture in which September 12, 1980 coup occurred were among the top priorities of the White House and the American policy makers who had looked to Turkey as one of the essential players to solve the emerging geopolitical puzzle, by relying on the government documents of the time.

Keywords: September 12, 1980 Coup in Turkey, Turkish-American Relations, Middle East, Cold War, Iranian Revolution.

Introduction

As the establishment of a special commission by the Turkish Parliament to investigate it after more than thirty years and ongoing trial of the once powerful coup leaders indicate that, September 12, 1980 Coup keeps its vivid place in the political memory of Turkish people. Since the 80s, one of the key questions, which have been repeatedly asked about the coup, is the nature of the relation between the Carter Administration and the military takeover in Turkey. Many people, both inside and outside of the academia, continue to believe that September 12 was part of the chain of coup d'etats supported, if not planned, by the United States due to Cold War related interests. According to this hypothesis, some significant geopolitical concerns affected the White House's backing of the generals in Ankara. Among them, facilitating the return of Greece to NATO's military wing and fears raised from tectonic power shifts caused by both Iranian Revolution and Russian invasion of Afghanistan have been mostly cited.¹

In this article, I will analyze the available primary sources to test the hypothesis above. Did the Carter Administration really associate those great changes and challenges of the time with its Turkey policy? The answer is explored through the declassified government documents, including the written correspondences between top level officials and special reports prepared by

¹ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, Routledge, London; New York, 1993, p. 184.; İlhan Uzgel, "ABD ve Nato'yla İliřkiler", *Türk Dıř Politikası : Kurtuluř Savařından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar Cilt 2: 1980-2001*, Ed. Baskın Oran, İletişim Yayınları, 12. Edition, İstanbul, 2010, p. 37.; Çetin Yetkin, *Türkiye'de Askeri Darbeler ve Amerika 27 Mayıs 1960-12 Mart 1971-12 Eylül 1980*, Kilit Yayınevi, 5. Edition, Ankara, 2011.

government agencies. I have reduced the number of references to secondary materials, even if they are valuable like published works of the experts and memoirs of the Statesmen in order to keep the argument specifically focused over foreign policy decision making circles of the Carter era.

How Has Greece Been Able to Return to NATO's Military Wing? Coup Leader General Evren's First Foreign Policy Decision

On September 12, 1980, news from Greece was added to the 'Evening Notes' prepared by the Situation Room for President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. McCloskey, then U.S. Ambassador in Athens, had reported interesting points associated to our study of inquiry while telling the reactions of Greek people towards the Coup in Turkey. According to McCloskey: "...some 'conspiratorial-minded citizens' are speculating that the U.S. was somehow behind the military takeover because, by coincidence, several morning papers carried an article claiming NATO "circles" were expressing a hope that the Turkish military would find some means of pressuring Ankara into accepting Greece's reintegration into NATO's military. The fact that local radio noted that a U.S. State Department spokesman first broke the news of the coup to the world helped fuel the speculation..."²

This document displays that both sides of the Aegean Sea had similar impressions about the reasons of the military takeover. The historical context which was full of debates on the reintegration of Athens to NATO and pressures over Turkey with the contributions of the powerful 'Greek Lobby' in Washington explains why the people have easily accepted this interpretation.³

² "Situation Room", White House, Memo, (1980, September 12), "National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is provided with evening notes on the following world events: Indian press coverage of the U.S. Congressional vote to supply nuclear fuel to India; Greek reaction to the coup in Turkey; UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow's offer of assistance in securing the release of the American hostages held in the 11/4/79 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran.", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Sep 12, 1980, Date Declassified: Nov 17, 2005, p. 2.

³ Paul B. Henze, "Turkish-American Relations", *Dış Politika*, Vol. XXIX, No. 3-4, 2004;

Richard Haass, "Alliance problems in the Eastern Mediterranean -Greece, Turkey and Cyprus:

Part I", *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 229, 1988; Robert McDonald, "Alliance problems in

the Eastern Mediterranean -Greece, Turkey and Cyprus: Part II", *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol.

The Greek Lobby's influence over the US policy towards Ankara had been so great to the extent that National Security Advisors' key staff who was responsible from Turkey, had openly criticized it multiple times even he himself was a firm supporter of Greece's reintegration to the NATO. In his report to Brzezinski, dated November 27, 1979, Paul Henze says: *"..It takes the myopia of the Greek Lobby to see the Turks' faults outweighing their virtues..."*⁴ In another instance, while analyzing the process of lifting the arms embargo imposed Turkey after the Cyprus crisis, Henze blames the Greek Lobby as an obstacle to the fulfillment of US national security interests expected from the relations with Turkey: *"...In reality this Administration waited too long to commit itself actively to lifting the Embargo and in the process jettisoned the Kissinger-Caglayanil DCA negotiated in 1976. Too much deference was shown to the Greek Lobby in the process—and thus the task of getting the Embargo lifted was made more difficult. Negotiating a new DCA with Turkey has, as a result, been an unduly complicated process—which has inhibited other efforts toward restoring a fully satisfactory relationship..."*⁵

Besides this, proGreece bias of the US Administration could give the Soviets an opportunity to improve its ties with Turkey. Soviet attempts to move Turkey away from Washington by using the economy as a leverage, had been always among the major concerns of the U.S. Documents prove that this matter had been discussed multiple times in the White House. For example, Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, Shitikov's request for Turkey's decline to allow U-2 flights⁶ was followed by a joint economic protocol *"...including a promise of more than 1.5 million metric tons of oil supplied to Turkey; a dam, iron and steel investments, aluminum production, and an oil refinery may lead to 8 billion dollars in Soviet financing."*⁷

⁴ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1979, November 27), CK3100155768, "Paul B. Henze expresses disappointment over President Jimmy Carter's negative attitude toward relations with Turkey. Henze feels Turkey is an indispensable ally in U.S. efforts to maintain stable relations with NATO countries and the Middle East.", SECRET, Issue Date: Nov 27, 1979, Date Declassified: May 20, 1999, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, March 26), CK3100151967, "Memorandum for AI Friendly from Paul B. Henze on the performance of the Carter administration toward relations with Turkey and the administration's role in the lifting of the Turkish arms embargo.", CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Mar 26, 1980, Date Declassified: Feb 26, 1999, pp. 1-2.

⁶ William Odom, White House, Memo, (1979, May 29), CK3100591214, "Presidential military adviser William Odom provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with a weekly report on the following Soviet affairs: signs of a succession struggle within the Soviet government; Soviet foreign policy items; military and arms control items; longer-term issues relating to the Warsaw Pact; Soviet economic data." TOP SECRET, Issue Date: May 29, 1979, Date Declassified: Jun 15, 2009, p. 2.

⁷ William Odom, White House, Memo, (1979, June 11), CK3100663461. "Presidential military assistant William Odom provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with

Henze tells how the Soviets tried to exploit Turkey's problems with White House backed Greece during his further steps aiming rapprochement with Ankara: *"The first concrete sign of well-planned Soviet efforts to split the U.S. from one of its NATO allies, according to Embassy Moscow, came in the form of a hastily arranged and unprecedented luncheon given last week by the Soviet deputy foreign minister for the Turkish ambassador and his staff. The Soviets used the occasion to toast Soviet—Turkish friendship and relations. While vaguely offering to be helpful to Turkey on "Aegean issues," the Soviet official not so subtly warned the Turks not to go too far with their base-rights agreement with the U.S."*⁸

But clear foreign policy costs of the Lobby were not limited by weakening ties between US and Turkey. Thanks to the support of the Lobby, Karamanlis government even found enough courage to threaten US with the shutdown of the bases if the Greece's NATO reintegration process would not be completed before long. McCloskey, American Ambassador to Greece, reported in his August 28, 1979 meeting with Karamanlis as: *"...Karamanlis emphasized that Turkish resistance to Greece's return to NATO is creating intense popular resentment in Greece, and the US is being blamed for not doing more to resolve the issue. The issue causes serious internal problems for Karamanlis who 'must always apologize for his pro-NATO policy.' If Athens finally rejects NATO's reintegration proposals, it would then withdraw its request to reintegrate, thus jeopardizing the continued existence of US bases on Greek soil..."*⁹

his weekly report on Soviet affairs. Odom provides background information on the following in preparation for President Jimmy Carter's Vienna, Austria, summit conference with Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev: Soviet domestic politics; Soviet economic situation; Soviet relations with Iran, Jordan, Yemen, Syria, Oman, Mozambique, the Canary Islands, Grenada, and Nicaragua; Soviet pre-summit diplomatic tactics. ", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Jun 11, 1979, Date Declassified: Jan 31, 2005, p. 2.

⁸ Paul B. Henze, White House, Memo, (1980, January 23), CK3100650625, "National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is provided with evening notes on the following world events: Soviet efforts to persuade Turkey to give up its NATO membership; Soviet anticipation of the boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games resulting from that country's occupation of Afghanistan; possible U.S. grain embargo against Switzerland, resulting from the Swiss sale of grain to the Soviet Union, which the Swiss had originally purchased from the U.S. ", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 23, 1980, Date Declassified: Nov 14, 2005, p. 1.

⁹ Robert J. McCloskey, Department Of State, Cable, (1979, August 30), CK3100670182, "Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) morning telegraphic summary. Issues include: update on the Havana, Cuba, summit conference of countries in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM); Chinese strategy in Cambodia; U.S. -Greek relations; call for Moroccan elections. Also attached is an intelligence summary concerning the following countries and issues: political differences between Cuban President Fidel Castro and Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito; reported cease-fire between the Iranian government and the Kurds; Romanian-Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) relations; Chinese concern over a Soviet threat in South Asia.", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Aug 30, 1979, Date Declassified: Apr 19, 2005, p. 4.

In another report sent from the Situation Room to Brzezinski, we can see the underlined concerns of the US vis a vis Greece again: “...He (Karamanlis) believes that Greece has reached agreement with NATO on Greek reintegration into the military wing and since the stumbling block was created by Turkish objections, the problem is one of NATO-Turkish relations. Karamanlis went on to state that Greece will closely examine any future U.S.-Turkish military agreements and will then seek negotiations to conclude a similar defense cooperation agreement. Without amplification he added that the continued status of U.S. military installations in Greece would depend on the outcome of these negotiations.”¹⁰

Two other documents dated after the September coup show that the Greece government had kept the pressure over the White House to help lift Turkish veto. On September 22, Henze reminded Brzezinski the urgent need to solve the problem. Otherwise: “Greek govt is serious about starting to close down US bases at end of year if NATO reintegration has not been accomplished.”¹¹ The same warning was repeated just a few days before the Turkey’s final decision about the return of Greece to NATO: “Karamanlis is making firm plans to close US bases by end of year if NATO reintegration fails.”¹²

The above mentioned documents clearly show the degree of the importance and urgency of Greece’s reintegration to the NATO for Washington. To reach this significant goal, the White House had repeatedly tried to use all available leverages over Ankara during the bargains with Turkey – aid was being one of them. A short handwritten note of President Carter on the Memorandum sent by Secretary of State Vance clearly shows the perspective of Washington: “*Re: Cyprus & NATO & Greece. We must hold Ecevit’s feet to the fire. If we help economically*

¹⁰ “Situation Room”, White House, Memo, (1980, January 3), CK3100694061, “National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is provided with evening notes on world events. Issues include: update on the political situation in Afghanistan resulting from the Soviet occupation of that country; Greek intentions to continue its foreign policy diplomacy with Western countries.”, TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 3, 1980, Date Declassified: Nov 14, 2005, p. 2.

¹¹ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, September 22), CK3100696360, “National Security Council (NSC) staff member Paul Henze provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with his evening report. Issues include: U.S. -Ethiopian relations; formation of a new government in Turkey; possible decision by Greece to close down U.S. bases in that country; new outbreak of fighting between Ethiopia and Somalia near the Kenyan border.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Sep 22, 1980, Date Declassified: Mar 22, 2001, p. 1.

¹² Paul B. Henze, White House, Memo, (1980, October 17), CK3100694084, “National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is provided with evening notes on world events. Issues include: update on Board of International Broadcasting matters; renewed aggression between Ethiopian and Somali forces; Ethiopian-U.S. relations; Greek plans to close all U.S. bases in that country by the end of 1980.”, TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Oct 17, 1980, Date Declassified: Mar 27, 2001, p. 1.

real “linkage” but no acknowledgement of it. Also stick with IMF standards.”¹³ For key personnel in the White House, aid was important not just to force civilian leadership to change his stand but also to influence the General Staff. Henze says: “...Grant aid continues to be of enormous importance, psychologically to the Turkish military leadership. If we press for concessions of them to permit Greece's return to NATO, they will have an additional reason to expect substantial military aid...”¹⁴ U.S. was not the only source of aid to Turkey. She had also played the role of “aid organizer” by persuading her allies, namely Germany and Japan, to provide financial support to Turkey. Interestingly, Washington requested from Germany to ask Turkey the lift of his veto on the Greece's return to NATO. Those lines are from the letter sent by Carter to then German Chancellor Helmut Schmit: “...Perhaps as you proceed in this work it will be possible for you or your representatives to emphasize to Turkey the increased importance of assuring the re-integration of Greece into NATO.”¹⁵

“Aid for lifting the Veto” equation can be seen in another important document prepared by the Secretary of State for President Carter after Turkey's decisions about economic reform on January 24, 1980. Two days later, Cyrus Vance sent his report including the Warren-Elekdağ meeting under the subtitle ‘*Turkish Request for Economic Assistance*’ to the White House: “...Warren also stressed our desire to wrap up our bilateral defense talks by February 22, and our hope that, in light of Soviet aggression in Afghanistan, Ankara would help us find an expeditious way to bring Greece back into the military wing of NATO.”¹⁶ Vance was not alone. In numerous

¹³ Cyrus Vance, Department of State, Memo, (1979, January 12), CK3100503983, “Secretary of State Cyrus Vance provides President Jimmy Carter with his daily report. Issues include: U.S. - Taiwanese relations; situation in Cyprus between Greek and Turkish Cypriots; Sudanese financial and security problems. ”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 12, 1979, Date Declassified: Jun 18, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁴ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1979, November 2), CK3100155765, “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul B. Henze regarding Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's advice that the U.S. not seek fiscal year 1981 grant aid for Turkey.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Nov 2, 1979, Date Declassified: May 20, 1999, p. 2.

¹⁵ Jimmy Carter, White House, Letter, (1980, January 17), CK3100110489, “Letter to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt from President Carter regarding West Germany's lead in the organization of an assistance program for Turkey. Carter hopes that West Germany will emphasize to Turkey the importance of the re-integration of Greece into NATO.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 17, 1980, Date Declassified: Jan 17, 1997, p. 2.

¹⁶ Cyrus Vance, Department of State, Memo, (1980, January 29), CK3100535066, “Secretary of State Cyrus Vance provides President Jimmy Carter with his daily report. Issues include: the situations in El Salvador and Nicaragua; British-Guatemalan relations; reports of major Israeli military movements into Southern Lebanon; status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan; Turkish request for U.S. economic assistance; prospects for a postponement, change of venue or cancellation of the Moscow Olympic Games. ”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 29, 1980, Date Declassified: Jul 31, 2002, pp. 2-3.

reports like this, Paul Henze advised the White House to use aid as a leverage to persuade Turkish leaders: “Announce more aid for Turkey and make an obvious, public gesture of good will. Simultaneously, tell Demirel in no uncertain terms that we want him to acquiesce in Greek NATO re-entry and we want Denktaş to behave in Cyprus.”¹⁷

More than seven months before the coup, Brzezinski submitted a note to Carter, indicating General Evren as key person to solve Greece reintegration to NATO stalemate.¹⁸ And after September 12, US officials delivered their demands to the Turkish counterparts in various occasions. The conversation between Turgut Ozal and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher was an example. Even so the agenda of the meeting was about the Turkish economy, Warren expressed his hope that in the councils of government Ozal would be one of those advocating trying to solve the reintegration problem as soon as possible.¹⁹ Three days later, Henze sent a note advising Brzezinski how to negotiate with Ozal during the planned meeting in Washington, D.C.: “Ozal may have other economic points to make but suggest you not let the meeting dwell too long on this topic—simply say we support them and will do everything we can to help—and shift the political plane by observing that our efforts to get economic and military support for them will be easier if they can also move to get some of the political issues that are important both to them and us settled soon: e.g. relations with Greece and Cyprus issues. Use the kind of arguments you have used before with good effect: “You won on Cyprus; you are a big country with a mature view of the world. Don't let the Greeks rattle you or harass you—put them on the defensive by taking bold steps to get these rancorous issues settled—you'll be farther ahead if you do.”²⁰

¹⁷ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, February 19), CK3100151507, “Memorandum regarding the psycho-political significance of U.S. influence toward a settlement of differences between Greece and Turkey.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Feb 19, 1980, Date Declassified: Feb 26, 1999, p. 4.

¹⁸ Bernie Rogers, Department of Defense, Memo, (1980, January 29), CK3100127780, “Memorandum for President Carter from Bernie Rogers regarding the reintegration of Greece into the NATO military structure.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 29, 1980, Date Declassified: Jun 24, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁹ Warren Christopher, Department of State, Cable, (1980, September 29), CK3100147265, “Cable regarding Deputy Secretary Christopher’s meeting with Turkish Economic Coordinator Ozal. Topics include: Turkish economic stabilization program; detained Turkish politicians; Greek reintegration into NATO; Turkish military leadership.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Oct 1, 1980, Date Declassified: Feb 25, 1999, p. 4.

²⁰ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, October 2), CK3100535998, “Paul Henze provides Zbigniew Brzezinski with background information and talking points in preparation for his meeting with Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Turgut Ozal. Issues include: the extent of U.S. economic and military assistance to Turkey; the Iraqi-Iranian war; the situation in the Middle East.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Oct 2, 1980, Date Declassified: Jun 04, 2003, p. 1.

The next document, which I want to mention, is the letter of General Evren to President Carter. In this letter, Evren expresses his “*gratitude for the understanding shown by the Government of the United States for the decision of the Turkish Armed Forces to assume total responsibility of Turkey.*” Then, he tells his *known* position on Greece’s return to NATO as the leader of the coup: “*I should like to underscore that Turkey has never failed to support the return of Greece to the integrated military structure of NATO. As is well known by Saceur, General Rogers and his predecessor, I, on my part, have spared no efforts to arrange for a formula to achieve this end.*”²¹

Ten days after General Evren’s letter, Turkey lifted its veto and let Greece rejoin to the NATO’s military wing, without demanding any kind of concession from Athens either in the Aegean Sea, or about any other subjects of dispute between two countries.²²

After the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Turkey and the US in the “New” Middle East

The CIA’s important interagency intelligence report, “New Realities in the Middle East”, was prepared after the Iranian revolution and finalized just before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This report defines the boundaries of the Middle East from Morocco to Pakistan. The interesting point is that, there was no place for Turkey in the map of the Middle East which was drawn as part of the report. Although Turkey was not seen as an integrated part of the Middle East, it was still thought as a potential player which had been encouraged to take more responsibilities in the region.

The report summarizes the main interests of the US and significant dynamics in the Middle East as follows: increasing dependence of the US to Middle Eastern oil, the growing tendency of the states to pursue their national interests independent of the great powers, growing anti-American feelings and the decline of the US influence in the region basically “*as the result of a historical trend that is not likely to be reversed*”.²³

²¹ Kenan Evren, White House, Letter, (1980, October 10), CK3100144873, “Letter to President Jimmy Carter from General Kenan Evran regarding the decision of the Turkish armed forces to assume total responsibility for Turkey.”, OMITTED, Issue Date: Oct 10, 1980, Date Declassified: Feb 25, 1999, p. 1.

²² Christos Kassimeris, “From Commitment to Independence: Greek Foreign Policy and the Western Alliance”, *Orbis*, Vol. LII, No. 3, 2008.

²³ Central Intelligence Agency, Report, (1979, December 1), CK3100663969, “Intelligence report entitled: “New Realities in the Middle East.” This document explores the following developments during the 1970s which resulted in anti-American feelings in the Middle East: the 1973 Arab-Israeli war; the rapid increase in oil prices; the revolution in Iran; the resurgence of a politicized Islam and a rejection of Western culture; the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty; Soviet

The concrete reflections of those general trends were underlined in the report: “...the rapid increase in oil prices, the revolution in Iran, the resurgence of a politicized Islam and a rejection of Western culture, and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty... Egypt is isolated within the Arab world, Iran is militarily weak and nearing anarchy, the pro-US Arab states often called moderates are taking a more independent course, seeking new allies in the area, an cooperating more often with radical, anti-Western Arab governments... The greatest potential for substantial Soviet gains in the near term is in Iran, where continuing serious instability could give way to a leftist regime more sympathetic to the USSR.”²⁴

The goal of the American strategists, who wrote the paper, was to construct a new strategy to secure the US interests in this turbulent region. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser of that time, the Iranian revolution had made this an urgent necessity: “...The fall of the Shah's regime in Iran has added a new and dangerous dimension to the crisis in the Middle East. Immediately, we face a problem of perceptions and expectations. For all countries, and especially those with whom we have good relations, the future is uncertain and threatening. They lack confidence in the direction of US policy and in the willingness of the U.S. to use its power on behalf of their security. This political and psychological crisis can only be contained by forceful and purposeful U.S. action...”²⁵

As a response to this challenge, Brzezinski offered a two tiered security architecture under the label of “Broad Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East”. He placed Israel and Egypt at the core of this concept. The place of Turkey was outside of the inner circle with Sudan.²⁶ But, its unique geocultural attributes and potential desires made Turkey's geopolitical value much more worth than other actors of the second tier. “...Turkey has been showing more interest in involving itself in regional questions and could serve as a natural bridge between the Muslim world and the West.”²⁷ The unique characteristics of Islam in Turkey was possibly a significant factor contributed to the determination of

influence in the Middle East. “New Realities in the Middle East.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Dec 1, 1979, Date Declassified: Jan 30, 2005, p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 1.

²⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1979, March 3), CK3100152359, “Paper outlines the U.S. security framework for the Middle East. Sources of instability include: Arab-Israeli conflict; Palestinian political status; socio-economic development; Soviet intervention.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Mar 3, 1979, Date Declassified: Feb 19, 1999, p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

²⁷ Peter Tarnoff, Department of State, Memo, (1980, January 16), CK3100664598, “State Department executive secretary Peter Tarnoff provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with background information on U.S. relations with radical Arabs in the following countries: Algeria; Libya; Iraq; Syria; South Yemen.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 16, 1980, Date Declassified: Oct 19, 2001, p. 3.

Turkey's position as a "bridge", what we can see in Brzezinski's sentences written for Carter: "...Islam in Turkey is essentially a force for bourgeois stability. Only on the fringes does it become involved with reaction or divisive tendencies."²⁸ In his other report to Carter titled as "Islamic Fundamentalism", Brzezinski expresses the same considerations: "...Egypt, Turkey, the North African states, and Jordan do not appear to be particularly vulnerable to Islamic fundamentalist movements..."²⁹ So, it is no surprise to see that, avoiding any major crisis with the "bridge" was among the four priorities of the US in the turbulent Middle East: "...Another major setback to U.S. policy in the area, such as ...another slump in US—Turkish relations, could put the region dangerously out of control."³⁰

As was noted by Brzezinski, one of the greatest strategic fears of the White House about the Middle East was determined Soviet efforts to exploit stresses in the region "to displace U.S. influence and to expand that of the U.S.S.R. for ideological, strategic and economic purposes."³¹ The comments made by the Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, two days before the arrival of Khomeini to Tehran, clearly indicates the relation between those fears and Turkey. In January 29, 1979, Vance said to Deng Xiaoping that: "...NATO's strong view is that Turkey is of great strategic importance in the region. Obviously, the importance increases as we see the instability in Iran. Concern about this is shown not just by the NATO Alliance but also by the European Community in general."³²

The Department of Defense Report, dated in June 15, 1979, warned the US and his allies about the possible dangerous developments and increasing need for a new force structure in and around the Gulf: "...We and our major industrialized allies have a vital and growing stake in the Persian Gulf region... ..Given this

²⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1979, January 19), CK3100543668, "Zbigniew Brzezinski provides President Jimmy Carter with National Security Council (NSC) Weekly Report no. 85. Issues include: a summary of Paul Henze's report on the political and economic situation in Turkey; Pakistani and Indian political situation; British defense spending; the Polish economic situation.", SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 19, 1979, Date Declassified: Sep 30, 2003, p. 1.

²⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1979, February 2), CK3100137193, "Zbigniew Brzezinski's memo to President Carter (NSC Weekly Report No. 87) in which he analyzes the political strength of Islamic fundamentalists in Middle Eastern countries. Several government studies are nearing completion.", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Feb 2, 1979, Date Declassified: May 04, 1998, p. 2.

³⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1979, March 3), CK3100152359, "Paper outlines the U.S. security framework for the Middle East. Sources of instability include: Arab-Israeli conflict; Palestinian political status; socio-economic development; Soviet intervention.", SECRET, Issue Date: Mar 3, 1979, Date Declassified: Feb 19, 1999, p. 1.

³¹ Ibid, p. 1.

³² Cyrus Vance, Department of State, Memo, (1979, January 29), CK3100154043, "Secretary of State Cyrus Vance meets with Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping regarding U.S. military assistance for Turkey. They also discuss the conflict between Turkey and Greece over the island of Cyprus.", SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 29, 1979, Date Declassified: Jun 29, 1999, p. 3.

*situation, and also the fact that we cannot even predict who will be the enemy of whom five years hence in the Middle East, it follows that our contingency force should be diverse and flexible. Today's contingency force is not well suited to many of the problems it is likely to the face...".*³³ An important note, in one of the reports sent by Paul Henze to Brzezinski, leaves us face to face with a great question: Did Turkey involve or prepare to involve any US military operation related with the Iran? Paul Henze wrote those words on February 12, 1979: *"...Reviewed with State problems that arose from mishandling of issue of marines and helicopters going to Iran via Turkey – if we aren't careful we could make it much more difficult..."*³⁴

Due to the fact that, I could not reach any other completing document shedding light to the mentioned operation above, it is not possible to make broader comments about the issue, at least for a while. But we know that the main reason of Washington's fear about the developments in Tehran was a possible Soviet military intervention in Iran as it was written in the Department of Defense's report: *"... The Soviets might invade Iran in order to seize a historic opportunity such as the civil chaos in Iran to alter suddenly the worldwide balance. Alternatively, they might create a Persian-Gulf crisis to divert the West if there were a crisis between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, or between the Soviet Union and China."*³⁵

³³ Department of Defense, *Agenda*, (1979, June 15), CK3100440761, "[Near East] The USS Liberty (AGTR-5) Struck by Torpedo [the S. S. [US and allied interests in the Gulf, Soviet objectives and concerns, historical great power rivalry in Persia, sources of stability and instability in the Gulf and Arabian peninsula, Soviet military options, and military threats to US interests are considered. Discussion also covers the threat to the oil SLOC's outside the Gulf, vulnerability of the Strait of Hormuz, and the danger of local insurgencies and conflicts. The section on a possible Soviet invasion of Iran is not attached]." Office of the Asst. Secy of Defense (PA&E) Study, Part One only. June 15, 1979. 39 p., il. [p. 3-5, 7-13, and others, not attached]. Security classification not given. SANITIZED copy. Released date not given., CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Jun 15, 1979, pp. 3-4.

³⁴ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1979, February 12), CK3100590189, "National Security Council (NSC) staff member Paul Henze provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with his evening report on the following: Board of International Broadcasting (BIB) matters; Soviet efforts to keep Sudanese President Gaafar Nimeiry and Ethiopian head of state Mengistu Haile Mariam from meeting.", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Feb 12, 1979, Date Declassified: Jan 31, 2001, p. 1.

³⁵ Department of Defense, *Agenda*, (1979, June 15), CK3100440761, "[Near East] The USS Liberty (AGTR-5) Struck by Torpedo [the S. S. [US and allied interests in the Gulf, Soviet objectives and concerns, historical great power rivalry in Persia, sources of stability and instability in the Gulf and Arabian peninsula, Soviet military options, and military threats to US interests are considered. Discussion also covers the threat to the oil SLOC's outside the Gulf, vulnerability of the Strait of Hormuz, and the danger of local insurgencies and conflicts. The section on a possible Soviet invasion of Iran is not attached]." Office of the Asst. Secy of Defense (PA&E) Study, Part One only. June 15, 1979. 39 p., il. [p. 3-5, 7-13, and others, not attached]. Security classification not given. SANITIZED copy. Released date not given., CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Jun 15, 1979, p. 7.

What was the plan of the Washington against such a kind of nightmare scenario? In the Brzezinski-Henze correspondents we see a discussion over an interesting possibility which gives us some clues about the US plans and shows the critical position of Turkey in the eyes of the American policy planners of the time. Henze begins with a question: *“Do the Soviets want to invade? In the final analysis, I find it impossible to believe that the Soviets could resist temptation to take over most or all of Iran if the opportunity presented itself to them in a form where they could get themselves invited in as a protecting power...”*³⁶ The second question of Henze opens the road to a possible Turkish role *“What does this mean for us? If we are going to take action the Iranians are going to regard as provocative, we must be prepared not only to face but to capitalize on the consequences. This means occupying a significant portion of the country—certainly the oil producing regions, preferably the entire, thinly populated SE coastal area and, if at all possible, and at least temporarily, Tebran itself. I am convinced that the Soviets would not want to fight us head—on in Iran. What we would have then, would be a division of the country between them and us, with their getting the rebellious Azeris, Kurds and Turkmen and a good proportion of Persians in the north and our taking the south with its oil and ports... ..In contemplating possibilities for unusual, far-reaching actions against Iran, we should at least think about the potential for more effective action we might have if we were able to utilize bases in Turkey for this purpose. The state of our relations with Turkey during rue 1970's has, in spite of the recently concluded DCA, left us sadly limited in our capacity to utilize that country's facilities. But how much is release of the hostages and settlement of our festering crisis in Iran worth to us? How much have we already expended on it? A half-billion dollars in military aid firmly committed to Turkey for the next three or four years would go a long way toward satisfying their needs for force modernization, would tie them in more firmly to NATO and would enormously strengthen the alliance in its southeastern sector. It does not seem to me that this would be too high a price to pay for utilization of Turkish bases for mounting a strike against Tebran.”*³⁷

But a second document prepared by “Situation Room” and being sent to National Security Advisor says that, Turkey would not give permission to Washington to use US/NATO bases against Iran. Besides this, Turkey would not join US for the implementation of the sanctions and embargo against Iran.³⁸ This position of the elected Turkish government arises the unanswered

³⁶ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, April 11), CK3100469805, “Memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul B. Henze regarding possible Soviet involvement in Iran due to U.S. retaliation against the Iranian seizure of the U.S. embassy in that country.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Apr 11, 1980, Date Declassified: Jan 19, 2000, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 1-2.

³⁸ “Situation Room”, White House, Memo, (1980, April 21), CK3100616594, “National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is provided with noon notes on the following world events: changes within the Yemeni government; U.S. policy in the Middle East; curtailment of Iran’s industrial output resulting from a lack of U.S. -origin machinery and equipment. The U.S. has imposed a boycott against Iran resulting from the 11/4/1979 Iranian seizure of the U.S. embassy

question about a potential expectation of the White House from a future military administration in Turkey: Did the US see a Turkish military leadership aiming to overthrow the elected politicians as a closer ally in a possible Iran campaign?

Another significant development which was increased the strategic value of Turkey in the geopolitical calculations of the US was the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. About seven months before the September 12th, 1980 Coup D'etat, deployment of the 40th Soviet Army in Afghanistan began by raising the alarm bells at the White House. Archival documents of the time clearly indicate that Carter Administration started to review military options against Soviet expansionism after immediately the invasion.³⁹

Among the advises of the security bureaucracy of the U.S. to counter the Moscow's expected ambitious steps Turkey had a place. On January 2, 1980 National Security Council (NSC) staff member Marshall Brement provided National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with a list of the U.S. contingency plans. One of the Brement's proposals was: "...Undertake new security relationships with Turkey, Somalia and Oman...".⁴⁰

On the following day, National Security Advisor Brzezinski submitted a report to Carter emphasizing the seriousness of the situation with a reference to Turkey: "...You have the opportunity to do what President Truman did on Greece and Turkey, and I believe that this is desirable both for domestic and international reasons."⁴¹

On January 9, Brzezinski put a more detailed report on the table of Carter titled as "*A Long-Term Strategy for Coping with the Consequences of the Soviet Action in Afghanistan*". In this paper, Brzezinski offers a couple of regional strategies.

by Islamic student militants in the capital city of Tehran.", TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Apr 21, 1980, Date Declassified: Nov 16, 2005, p. 2.

³⁹ Congress, Report, (1980, June 30), CK3100635741, "Text of a 10:10 a.m. hearing before the Subcommittee on Priorities and Economy in Government of the Joint Economic Committee on the intelligence community's assessment of the allocation of economic, military, and power resources in the Soviet Union and China for the year 1980. This session concentrated on the following: examination of Soviet resource allocations that provide the capability for projecting power and influence outside of its borders; Chinese political stability, modernization, and recent developments in strategic weapons.", OMITTED, Issue Date: Jun 30, 1980.

⁴⁰ Marshall Brement, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, January 2), CK3100579988, "National Security Council (NSC) staff member Marshall Brement provides National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski with a list of U.S. contingency plans in light of the 12/27/1979 Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.", SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 2, 1980, Date Declassified: Nov 12, 2008, p. 3.

⁴¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1980, January 3), CK3100098578, "Memo to President Carter from Zbigniew Brzezinski details a U.S. strategic reaction to the Afghanistan problem, including a wider security arrangement for the region around Afghanistan.", SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 3, 1980, Date Declassified: Dec 09, 1996, p. 1.

“U.S.-Turkish Security Consultations” was one of them: “We will review the possibility of sending a mission to Ankara to consult with the Turks on the situation resulting from the Iran and Afghanistan situations.”⁴²

These documents indicate that parallel to the advised strategy, the White House begun to cooperate with key allies. On January 11, Carter sent a letter to the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt regarding a Western response to the Soviet invasion and occupation in Afghanistan. In the letter Carter underlines the perceived level of danger: “In my view, the Soviet action represents one of the most serious security challenges which our countries have faced in the post-war era.”⁴³ One of the requests of Carter from Schmidt was to lead on the aid efforts to Turkey. In the letter, Turkey was described as “the NATO member nation most directly affected in the region by recent developments, and most in need of support itself.” Carter listed aims of the aid as: “...a major and sustained commitment to the military and sustained commitment to the military and economic security of Turkey, and to its direct engagement in discussions and planning about events further east.”⁴⁴ Japan and Saudi Arabia were other sources of aid to Turkey orchestrated by Washington.⁴⁵

New strategic perspective focusing on the threats beyond the eastern frontiers of Turkey was reflected to the priority plannings of the State Department. We see Turkey, at the list of State Department’s foreign policy goals, dated to April 4, 1980, in the “primary” category.⁴⁶ Turkey also kept his primary position in other significant document which carries the signature of the National Security Advisor just four months before the military takeover. On

⁴² Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1980, January 9), CK3100092090, “Memo from Brzezinski to President Carter on a long-term strategy for coping with the consequences of the Soviet action in Afghanistan. Includes handwritten additions and revisions.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 9, 1980, Date Declassified: Jun 11, 1996, p. 2.

⁴³ Jimmy Carter, Department of State, Cable, (1980, January 11), CK3100138889, “Text of a letter from President Jimmy Carter to West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt regarding a Western response to the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.”, SECRET, Issue Date: Jan 11, 1980, Date Declassified: Oct 27, 1998, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Fumihiko Togo, White House, Letter, (1980, February 23), CK3100565596, “Japanese Ambassador Fumihiko Togo provides President Jimmy Carter with text of Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira’s letter in which Ohira discusses the following: the U.S. hostage crisis in Iran; U.S. -Japanese relations; stability in the Middle East; Indian-P”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Feb 23, 1980, Date Declassified: Aug 03, 2005, p. 2.; Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, September 2), CK3100504763, “Paul Henze provides Zbigniew Brzezinski with his evening report. Issues include: developments in the wake of a U.S-Somali agreement; Italian equipment sales to Somalia; Saudi loan to Turkey; U.S. -Egyptian Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) transmitter agreement.”, TOP SECRET, Issue Date: Sep 2, 1980, Date Declassified: Mar 22, 2001, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Department of State, Memo, (1980, April 4), CK3100701674, “List of State Department primary and secondary foreign policy goals.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Apr 4, 1980, p. 1.

May 16, 1980 “*Status Report on the Security Framework for the Persian Gulf*” was submitted to Carter. In this paper, Brzezinski mentions Turkey with Pakistan among the key foreign policy issues which was necessary to be held to counter Soviet strategy.⁴⁷

Building a material/economic base with the aid flow was not enough to position Turkey to play a more active role in the new geopolitical theater. The persuasion of the Turkish leadership was also necessary. Documents indicate that the American government supported a series of meetings to encourage “significant Turks”. Henze reports to Brzezinski about the activities of Albert Wohlstetter aiming to fulfill this mission: “*Albert and his colleagues working with key people in the Pentagon (Andy Marshall, Jim Siena, Bob Murray) and in Germany (Uwe Nerlich) are now organizing a conference... In light of events in Afghanistan they have decided to devote one day of it to joint U.S.-German-Turkish initiatives in the Middle East, with special emphasis on what the Turks can do for us throughout the Middle East, but especially in Iran and Afghanistan. They are inviting several significant Turks.*”⁴⁸ Back-door diplomacy events that Wohlstetter played a major role were numerous and Istanbul was among the hosting cities just two months before the Coup: “*...Finally Albert Wohlstetter wanted to urge me to go to Istanbul to participate in a meeting the Turks are organizing to talk about Afghanistan, Persian Gulf, etc. He pointed out that he (like me) had been urging the Turks for a long time to reach out and concern themselves more, on behalf of the alliance as well as in their own interest, in the affairs of their part of the world—and the fact they are holding this meeting seems to be evidence of some response. The meeting is going to take place 3-5 July in Istanbul.*”⁴⁹

Were those mounted efforts able to create desired reactions which could satisfy the raised expectations of Washington on the part of the civilian Turkish officials? To find a clue for an answer we can look at the top level correspondences covering the term about seventeen months before the Coup. Two significant letters sent to Carter by successive prime ministers of Turkey, Ecevit and Demirel, indicate the cautious perspective of civilian governments in

⁴⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, White House, Memo, (1980, May 16), CK3100152446, “Zbigniew Brzezinski’s Weekly Report no. 141 regarding the status on the security framework for the Persian Gulf region. Topics include: political conditions; U.S. force capabilities; local defense capabilities; economic issues.”, SECRET, Issue Date: May 16, 1980, Date Declassified: Dec 01, 1998, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, January 10), CK3100611752, “National Security Council (NSC) staff member Paul Henze informs National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski of a proposal for closer U.S., West German, and Turkish collaboration.”, CONFIDENTIAL, Issue Date: Jan 10, 1980, Date Declassified: Aug 04, 2000, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Paul B. Henze, National Security Council, Memo, (1980, June 3), CK3100162387, “Memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski from Paul B. Henze regarding U.S. military assistance for Turkey.”, OMITTED, Issue Date: Jun 3, 1980. Date Declassified: Feb 24, 1999, p. 2.

Ankara vis a vis the new demands of Washington related with the tectonic geopolitical shifts in the region.

On April 21, 1979, Ecevit sent Ankara's answer to Carter about demanded new responsibilities from Turkey, some of them related with the request to accept the installation of intelligence facilities once functioning in Iran: "...I am sure you would appreciate Mr. President, that Turkey, being situated in a most sensitive part of the world and faced with immense problems, would not wish to risk her own security and endanger her own relations with the soviet union and other neighboring countries while trying to contribute to improved east-west relations and to world peace... ...The modernization of the already existing installations in Turkey for improved verification can be considered separately. Since this may be interpreted and explained within the framework of our existing co-operation. But any new arrangement should be initiated in a way that would not create new problems either for Turkey or for our region and for the east-west relations in general."⁵⁰

But the Turkish policy what was aiming neither to provoke Soviets nor to alienate the U.S., required to fulfill other minor demands of Washington to keep ties alive. This concern can be observed in the letter of Demirel sent to Carter on May 23, 1980: "Mr. President, I would like to further inform you that the Turkish government, in a special meeting held today, examined the situation once again taking into account the continued occupation of Afghanistan, has decided to boycott the summer olympic games in Moscow."⁵¹

There is no doubt that, Washington would prefer to see a kind of Ankara that was more motivated to take greater risks against suspected Soviet intentions in the region. Did this expectation affect the White House's stand towards the Coup plot of the Turkish generals? The changes mentioned above in the USA's geopolitical priorities, make to ask this question legitimate.

Conclusion

Recent research on the September 12, 1980 military takeover of Turkey brings elucids both the awareness and positive attitude of the Carter

⁵⁰ Bülent Ecevit, White House, Letter, (1979, April 21), CK3100483933, "Letter to President Jimmy Carter from the Turkish government regarding Turkish support of the U.S. -Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II). Turkey will work to contribute to the improvement of East-West relations and world peace as long as Turkey's national security is not compromised.", SECRET, Issue Date: Apr 21, 1979, Date Declassified: Feb 19, 1999, pp. 1-2.

⁵¹ Süleyman Demirel, White House, Letter, (1980, May 23), CK3100111002, "Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel informs President Jimmy Carter that Turkey will not participate in the 1980 Olympic Games to be held in Moscow. Turkey condemns the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops and feels it poses a serious threat to world peace. Dept. of State transmittal form from Peter Tarnoff is attached to Demirel's letter.", OMITTED, Issue Date: May 23, 1980, Date Declassified: Jun 05, 1997, p. 1.

administration towards the Coup.⁵² The focus of the questions about the major motivations of Washington's support for the Coup is over the geopolitical concerns of the time. U.S.' demands from Turkey to allow the reintegration of Greece to NATO's military wing and changing balances of power in the Middle East after two significant developments, namely the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, are mostly cited through the literature.

The governmental documents, analyzed during the research process for this paper, also indicate that those issues were among the top priorities of the White House. Beside this, the American policy makers perceived Turkey as one of the required players to resolve the emerging geopolitical puzzle. Although, civilian governments in Ankara had tried to fulfill American expectations to a certain degree, documented evidence shows that the Turkish military was seen as a valuable partner which was both able and willing to assume some of the demanded responsibilities.

In this article, I tried to show the importance of Turkey and its relations considering the mentioned geopolitical issues above, which were part of the historical conjuncture during the September 12, 1980 Coup. But, to draw a more direct link between the Turkish generals and the White House we still need further research supported by more empirical evidence.

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⁵² Mehmet Akif Okur, "Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerinin 12 Eylül Kavşığı: Amerikan Belgeleri Darbe Hakkında Ne Anlatıyor?", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Vol. X, No. 40, 2014.

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