

# Relations Between Turkey and the United States During the AKP Era

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The Justice and Development Party (AKP) is a Turkish political party founded under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 14 August 2001. According to the party charter, its official abbreviation is “AK Parti” and its symbol is a light bulb. It is the party with the highest number of members with 289 deputies in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The chairman of the party is Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is also the president of Turkey. Like most of the countries in the world, US relations for Turkey are the most important part of Turkish foreign policy. September 11 was an important turning point for Turkey’s foreign policy. The new Islamic tsunami showed its impact with AKP government in Turkey. After September 11, Turkey was cited as an example for the Islamic world. In addition, in this process, Turkey became a strategic partner of the United States and became a soft power. As an example of Arab leaders, Turkey began to play the role of spiritual leader and conscience of the Islamic world.

*Keywords:* international relations, US-Turkish affairs, AKP government

## Introduction

After September 11, Turkey developed a new perspective that also regulated its relations with the West. The European Union nomination process has been accelerated. Although not a permanent force, Turkey has become a global player in its region. Besides, Turkey alienated itself from organizations, such as the Taliban and Al Qaeda (Alex, 2019).

The decisions taken at the joint session of the 3 September 2001 Congress have revealed the basic characteristics of American policy, and according to these decisions, which will later be called the Bush Doctrine, the US Administration has put forward its strategies called preventive war, which is unilaterally aggressive and aimed at eliminating danger before it arises. Based on the premise that you are from us or not,

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this strategy has created a new era in the world and has created consequences, such as isolation in countries, namely, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran (Aras & Bacik, 2007).

There are some common aspects between the AKP Administration that emerged in the midst of all these developments and the Republican Bush Administration. Both of these administrations defended the Bush conservative worldview and market economy. Because of its central location, Turkey is a country that today needs to cooperate with its neighbors. The land in which Turkey is located is very valuable; it has a location adjacent to Europe in the North West, Russia in the North East, the Middle East and Africa in the south, and the Caucasus in the East. The close US interest in Turkey since the Cold War is related to the appeal of Turkey's special position. We see that USA, used Turkey to surround Russia during the Cold War, today is struggling to use Turkey in line with its goals in the Middle East. One of the most serious crises between the United States and Turkey has been the increased activity and violent actions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization in 2005. This has been the issue that Turkey has focused most on in the Middle East. Turkey's expectation of a joint operation against the PKK in Iraq has never been met by the United States; it has always been incomplete (Alex, 2019). Although the crisis was overcome a little bit during the second period of the Bush Administration, when we look at this today, we see that Turkey's southern border is again surrounded by this danger of the PKK, and we see that the USA is favoring this.

When we look at the dynamics underlying mistrust of Turkey's bilateral relations, we see that, in fact, these dynamics are among the biggest problems in Turkey. I think that the military support of the USA to the People's Protection Units (YPG), which is in Turkey that the United States has declared an ally in the Middle East, recognizes as a terrorist organization, should not be interpreted as discrediting Turkey (Akhtar, 2021). However, it is clear that it has given a message to Turkey on this occasion. This message includes the concerns of the United States about Turkey's ability to act more freely in the Middle East and cooperate with the country it wants. Turkey is asked to continue its existence as a country that is neither developed nor underdeveloped; and today, besides this, Turkey is struggling with a thousand difficulties (Albright, Hadley, & Cook, 2012).

As a result, relations have also experienced periods of close cooperation, symbolized by concepts, such as "strategic partnership"; and have also been the scene of very severe crises that cannot be encountered between allies (Isyar, 2005).

Turkey and the United States have political, military, strategic, and economic relations based on mutual interest, within the framework of respect. Turkey has been a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for nearly 65 years and has maintained close relations with the United States for many years. Bilateral relations with the United States are carried out intensively at all levels on many issues (Alex, 2019).

Relations between Turkey and the United States have been redefined as of 2001. It was the struggle to get out of the economic crisis that Turkey experienced in 2001 that was instrumental in the acquisition of a new dimension in these relations, which were already bumpy. The United States has not denied its support to Turkey's in this regard (Acar & Urhal, 2007).

The second part of the redefinition of bilateral relations was Turkey's position in the Iraq crisis. This crisis/war required a redefinition of the borders and dimensions of relations between Turkey and the United States. Of course, the issue of intervention in Iraq, where Turkey has intensive commercial and political relations, explains Turkey's concerns. What has happened and what has been said can affect Turkey's perpetuity. Turkey and the United States, which have similar interests in many issues from the past to the

present, have been at different points on the Iraq crisis. The 331 km shared border of Turkey's biggest concern was the issue where the division of Iraq. If Turkey could be convinced that Iraq would not be divided, perhaps the point at which it would take its stand could have changed, but Turkey had not taken the guarantee. Although the United States guaranteed this in verbally, they could not provide this assurance with what they did.

Those who expressed the opinion that Turkey was unnecessarily alarmed about Iraq at the time probably saw how wrong they were later. Those who claim that Turkey is dramatizing what is happening in Iraq have been mistaken. In fact, Turkey was aware from the very beginning that the plan intended for Iraq was not just because of Saddam. Turkey's advanced intelligence network has always known about Iraq, and in this way, it has always had a hand in the game about Iraq. The Turks could see that what the United States was trying to do in Iraq could cause details that would pose a threat to new states and Turkey, rather than stability. And what the Turks felt actually came true. Iraq has been divided, and the PKK has taken a more comfortable footing in the issue of structuring in Iraq. Turkey's economic relations in Iraq have been disrupted. For a country, like Turkey that cannot export much and has a foreign trade deficit, this means much more serious (Alex, 2019).

The government accepted the request for a military operation and brought it to parliament, but it was rejected by parliament, and this was interpreted as a maneuver of the Turkish government. In fact, although the AKP government accepted this issue and brought it to Parliament, it also showed its reluctance and did not make efforts to pass this motion. During this period, the United States adopted a complete unilateralism, but there is the understanding that you are either one of us or our enemy. The US Administration has criticized Turkey and the Turkish military on this issue. Later, this situation took on a new and bad dimension with the arrest of a Turkish soldier by US soldiers in northern Iraq with a sack on his head (Çakmak, 2005).

The attitude of the United States towards Turkey's reaction and initiatives and the displayed slowness has been followed with concern from Turkey's point of view. On the one hand, the incident had strengthened the hand of political groups, which were very skeptical of the United States, in Turkey, narrowed the field of the government in the matter of cooperation with the United States; and then had become material quite often by popular culture.

### **The Sack Incident**

The Sack Incident occurred on July 4, 2003, in which 11 members of the Turkish Armed Forces under the command of a major, who had set up a headquarters in the city of Süleymaniye in Northern Iraq, and their Turkmen hosts were taken with sacks on their heads by the soldiers of the American 173rd Airborne Brigade, which is a part of the occupation forces in Iraq, accompanied by the peshmerga, as a result of a surprise raid; were detained for 60 hours and interrogated.

On 4 July (Independence Day), the most important US national holiday, for the operation was chosen, the day coincided with Friday, it took a long time to reach the competent American authorities who could quickly and diplomatically resolve the issue under these conditions; and, the detention of Turkish soldiers for 60 hours and the resort to humiliating deliberate actions by American soldiers led to the opinion that the sack incident was a provocation (Alex, 2019).

Decision-makers in Turkey have only responded verbally to the crisis and made diplomatic moves. In the Sulaimaniya crisis, Turkey's crisis management technique is the negotiation. The meeting on July 18

reveals that a bargain has been struck. In general, it is possible to say that the incident is a military and political crisis. The crisis management strategy of the USA in the Sulaimaniya Crisis is “blackmail”. While it is an example of a sudden crisis from Turkey’s point of view, it shows the characteristic of being “fictionalized” by the United States. The Sulaimaniya Crisis and the Sack Incident in 2003 are examples of the prestige crisis in terms of causing the image that Turkey is a country that cannot even protect its military (Aras & Bacik, 2007).

The issue of the crisis shows the characteristics of diplomatic-political and military security crisis according to its content. While the trigger action in the Suleymaniye Crisis is outside the territory of Turkey, it can be considered as a non-violent military action. Because, although various violent incidents occurred during the detention of the Turkish liaison team, “violence” has been handled as an answer the question of “was the bullet fired?” by the Turkish Foreign Policy crisis Review Group. As a result, the crisis was resolved by compromise by sleeping.

### **Gezi Park Resistance**

The 2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests were started as an act of preventing the AKP Government from rebuilding the Artillery Barracks in Taksim Gezi Park, which is located in Beyoğlu district of Istanbul and allocated to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality at the title deed, on the condition that it is used only for public service, without a zoning permit, despite the decision of the Istanbul 6th Administrative Court and the No. 2 Council for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

After the Artillery Barracks project, the trees were removed on the side of Gezi Park facing the Divan Hotel. Upon the realization of the situation and calls for action on social media, tents were set up in the park and kept watch. In the morning, the crowd increased in the park. Police intervened with tear gas to the demonstrators, including the famous “woman in red”. Police intervened the demonstrators who set up tents in the park. There were fires in some tents. Meanwhile, Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) deputy of the time, Sırrı Süreyya Önder was among the demonstrators. Later, representatives of various political parties and non-governmental organizations also attended. The work stopped, but the demonstrators did not leave the park in case it could resume. While the intervention of the police at around 5.00 in the morning was harsher, the fire that broke out in the tents drew reaction on the social media. After the calls for action, the crowd increased in Taksim. Istanbul Sixth Administrative Court annulled the decision that approved the construction of the Artillery Barracks.

The crowd gathered on the Anatolian side, passed the Bosphorus Bridge, and reached Taksim Square. Police withdrew from the square after that day. While Taksim Square was under the control of the demonstrators for 10 days, barricades were set up at the points that lead to the square. Demonstrations spread to almost every city. With the police intervention in Taksim, the protests ended after 20 days. It was stated that four million people participated in the protests across the country. Eight people, one of whom was a policeman, had passed away in the incidents; the number of injured was expressed in thousands.

Gezi Park Resistance is a point to be emphasized in Turkish-American relations in terms of the form and severity of the reactions. In a period, in which Turkey has repaired its relations compared to 10 years ago, or even considered as a close ally of Turkey, when the government declared that relations were better than ever, namely in 2013; during the Gezi Park Resistance, the United States made statements that put Turkey in a difficult position and exceeded the government’s expectation.

However, as a result of the outbreak of the Gezi Events and the increasing demonstrations and mass movements, the American officials started to show some reactions in coordination with the European authorities; the Secretary of State of the US at that period, John Kerry, made the statement that “harsh intervention of the police is alarming” and, with a few sentences in this manner, he made statements that fit exactly the US jargon, such as “we want to work more closely with Turkey”.

Consequently, Turkey’s Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, during that period, made the statement that “Turkey is not a second-class democracy” in a form of response to his counterpart in the US. Relationships have strained over this. Similar statements came from Republican US Senator John McCain, who we know was advocating US intervention in Syria, and McCain criticized Turkey with his own style because of the Gezi Events. McCain increased the dose of criticism, stating that for Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister at the time, “in the eyes of many Turks, he is more of a dictator than a prime minister”.

In addition, McCain stated that they did not expect a Turkish Spring. These kinds of statements actually show that Americans pay close attention to the Gezi Events. It was possible to see the interest in question in the second meeting of the Turkish-American Council, which was held for the 32nd time that year. The director of the meeting was Terence Smith (Alex, 2019).

The participants of the meeting were Karen De Young, a reporter for *The Washington Post* who specializes in security and intelligence issues, Kemal Kirisci, director of the Brookings Institution for Turkey, Daniel Abraham in Washington, one of the founders of the Turkish friendship group of the American Congress, and Robert Wexler, president of the Middle East Peace Center. Francis Ricciardone, the Ambassador of the United States of America to Ankara, who was announced among the participants, did not attend the meeting. At the congress, founder of the Turkish Friendship Group and former member of the House of Representatives Robert Wexler stated that the Turkish government interfered with the lifestyle of the Turkish people as the reason for the events, and that the small-scale actions people took to protect the common space gained a political dimension; he stated that the growth and continuation of these events had a great impact on the government’s effort to interfere with the lifestyle of its citizens.

Underlining the lifestyle issue, he stated that even young people without political views took to the streets to react. Kirişçi, on the other hand, said that Erdogan’s attitude did not show hope. In the American-Turkish Council held in 2012, bilateral relations were discussed in the fields of economy, politics, and military and how favorable they were, while the harsh and anti-democratic attitude of Erdogan and the AKP against the events was discussed in the meeting held in 2013. In the 31st American-Turkish Council meetings, although the prominent issues were trade and cooperation between the two countries, the security concerns of the USA were also conveyed to the Turkish side over these issues. But in the current situation, the fact that the speeches of the American-Turkish Council were the scene of meetings in which government officials were criticized in the most severe language as a result of the events taking place in Turkey also suggested the possibility of deteriorating relations from the point of view of the government.

As a result, the USA laid the foundations of the breaking point of bilateral relations, which are claimed to be “better than ever”, by making extremely severe criticism from the mouths of the most authoritative people over the Gezi Park events. When we look at this tension statistically, it is expressed that according to the statements made by the US State Department and the White House, it is affirmed that the attack on freedom of demonstration was used 12 times and the use of excessive force 11 times. The fact that the US State

Department underlined “police violence” and “excessive use of force” in the White House statements has revealed the US perspective on the events taking place in Turkey. Relations with the United States, which are claimed to have been going very well in recent years, led to differences of opinion between the two sides on the Syrian issue, and eventually took the form of an implicit conflict. The statements made at that time show that the US did not approve of Erdogan’s attitude, and that the attitude of the then President Abdullah Gul was approved. We can attribute this to the tension that Erdogan experienced during his trip to the United States.

### **July 15, 2016 Coup Attempt**

On 15 July 2016, the Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü) (FETÖ), organized within the army, attempted a bloody and preposterous new coup with warplanes, helicopters, and tanks. They drove tanks on the citizens who opposed the coup in the streets. FETÖ, which bombed the presidency, parliament, police and public buildings and people who opposed the coup with fighter jets in Ankara and Istanbul, also attempted to assassinate President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The coup attempt failed with the opposition of the people and other elements of the state. One hundred and seventy-three civilians, 62 policemen, and five soldiers had passed away during the coup attempt. One thousand four hundred and ninety-one people were also injured in the attack by the coup plotters.

If the coup attempt was successful, thousands of innocent people would have lost their lives, democracy and freedoms would have been abolished, and a military dictatorship would have been established on the axis of Fetullah Gülen’s deviant religious views. All segments of society, political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, the media, and the business world have strongly opposed this outdated coup attempt. At this point, the bloody coup attempt was suppressed and state institutions mostly returned to their normal functioning.

As a result of the events, more than 300 people lost their lives, 104 of whom were pro-coup soldiers, 1,491 people were injured, and 8,036 soldiers of different ranks were detained. The total number of detentions, including members of the judiciary and civil politics, reached 10,000 as of 22 July. In addition, many people were dismissed from military, administrative, and judicial institutions.

New statements are coming every day about the extradition of Fethullah Gulen from the United States to Turkey. Turkey has already sent a large number of documents to the US in this regard. In the statements made on this regard, it is indicated that the US have declared that “examination will be held before the Law”, in a puny way. Different reactions continue to come from Turkey against the US resistance (Alex, 2019).

### **The Visa Crisis**

After the July 15 coup attempt, Fethullah Gulen and his community’s activities abroad have become Turkey’s main foreign policy priority. Fethullah Gulen is the one who started both the process of the visa crisis and the chief responsible for the coup attempt. Ankara could not get the response it asked from Washington in line with its demands regarding Fethullah Gülen. Meanwhile, Gülen has been living in the US, Pennsylvania, since 1999. Although President Recep Tayyip Erdogan repeatedly raised the extradition request during his talks with former US President Barack Obama and his current successor, Donald Trump, in August 2016, applications for Gulen’s extradition from the US to Turkey were inconclusive. Last year, then Minister of Justice Bekir Bozdağ visited the United States for Gülen’s extradition and even demanded temporary arrest for Gülen. In October, the new Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül stated that the file regarding the extradition of

Fethullah Gülen from the USA was completed and there was nothing missing left about the process. Despite these demands, Turkey has not received what it wants from Washington (Arslan, Dost, & Wilson, 2018).

Although there were many problems in Syria, including the YPG dispute, the fight against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), and problems with territorial integrity, the extradition of Gulen was the focus of the US-Turkey diplomatic shift. Turkey's priority request was for the United States to temporarily detain Gulen, and extradite Gulen to Turkey for trial in the light of the evidence and files sent. However, it was revealed that these files, which were sent to the US Department of Justice, were not sent to federal courts. This shows the reluctance of the USA on this issue and this problem continues to be a problem between the two countries. The arrest of Metin Topuz, working at the US Consulate General in Istanbul, on the grounds that he was linked to Fethullah Gülen, who was held responsible for the July 15 Coup Attempt, stands out as the reason that fired the fuse.

There have been previous incidents, such as visa suspensions, after the March 1 negotiations with the United States in 2003, and the putting sacks over the heads of US soldiers in 2014, but this latest incident was different from the others. The reason is that the visa application is so comprehensive that it "applies to citizens of both countries". The United States and Turkey have always been through difficult processes, but it is difficult to remember the kind of sanctions that would deprive all American and Turkish citizens of each other's countries.

The fact that the Turkish side retaliated against Washington's visa decision within three to four hours actually shows that Turkey is prepared for such a decision. Although the visa crisis has been resolved as of today, from time to time, the US Consulate General postpones the visa appointments of Turkish citizens or is closed for some days. With the mutual removal of the restrictions on visas, it was stated from the US Embassy in Ankara that "the Turkish government adhered to the guarantee provided at a high level" (Arslan et al., 2018).

### **Priest Brunson Crisis**

The priest of the Izmir Resurrection Church, US citizen Andrew Craig Brunson, was ordered to be deported with his wife Norine Lyn Brunson on the allegation that he had engaged in "activities threatening national security". The Brunson couple, who have lived in Turkey for 20 years, were taken from their home in the Mimar Sinan neighborhood of Izmir and handed over to the Immigration Administration.

While the deportation proceedings continued, an "anonymous witness" testified at the prosecutor's office against Brunson during the 15 July investigation and Evangelical Pastor Brunson was arrested on the grounds that he was affiliated with Gülen and PKK. On the charge of "obtaining the state's confidential information for political or military espionage purposes", 20 imprisonment of up to 35 years in total was asked. The request for Brunson's release was raised during the Trump-Erdogan meeting in Washington. In his speech at the Police Academy Graduation Ceremony in Beştepe, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated, "Give us the priest, they say. You also have a priest. You give him to us and we will do it, we will give you what is necessary in the judgment". These statements caused criticism of "bargaining" (Gegelashvili, 2020, p.46).

It was announced that Brunson, who waited in prison for the preparation of his indictment for 16 months, was asked to be sentenced to life imprisonment for his "FETÖ/PDY membership and management". Thirty-five years of imprisonment was ordered. Brunson's first hearing was held. US senators applied to the Ministry of Justice to monitor the hearing. Previously, for Brunson, 37 Senators and 78 Congressmen had written a letter to

President Erdogan, demanding his release and deportation. It was decided to continue his detention and the hearing was postponed to 7 May. On the same day after the decision, it was announced that the Halkbank-Hakan Atilla case was postponed to 16 May.

Trump stated that “Pastor Brunson is being persecuted in Turkey”, and immediately afterward the first warning of sanctions came from US Deputy Secretary of State Wess Mitchell. Mitchell declared that “If Brunson is not released, there could be consequences for Turkey”. A day later, the two senators started work on the sanction.

Accused by three anonymous witnesses at the second hearing, and denied all these charges, Brunson’s request for release was denied and the trial was adjourned. Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu responded to the calls from Washington for the release of the priest by saying that the legal process cannot be intervened and the result of the court should be waited.

Trump:

Brunson is innocent. If he is a spy, I am more of a spy than him. His trial continues in Turkey, but the judicial process is not much of a judicial process. We are talking to the people in Turkey to do something about it. Father Brunson, I hope you can hear us, we will help you at some point. We have been working on this for a long time.

After this date, the issue of F-35 fighter jets began to be mentioned in the United States together with Brunson.

US Senators Lindsey Graham and Jeanne Shaheen visited Brunson in prison and then met with Erdogan. Graham later stated that she had informed Erdogan that relations with Turkey would not come to a better point if this issue was not resolved. Graham is known as the head of the senators who prepared the sanction work. Brunson’s application for eviction was rejected for the third time. This decision aroused US officials. President Trump called the incident “disgrace” on Twitter and called on President Erdogan, and demanded that Brunson be released (Alex, 2019). The US Senate has taken action to prevent Turkey from being given loans by international financial institutions.

Brunson’s detention, who was asked to be sentenced to 35 years in prison for espionage allegations, was turned into house arrest in a way that he could accept visitors and use the Internet and all communication tools, considering his “health problems”. The USA declared that this is not enough. Consecutive sanction announcements have made by first the US Vice President Mike Pence followed by president Trump. Pence declared that, “I have a message for President Erdogan and the Turkish government on behalf of President Trump: Release Pastor Andrew Brunson immediately or be prepared to suffer the consequences” Pence also stated that “The United States will impose some economic sanctions against Turkey” (Gegelashvili, 2020).

The USA decided to sanction Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu and Minister of Justice Abdulhamit Gül on the grounds that they had a share in not releasing Brunson. It was decided that the two ministers were blacklisted and seized their assets in the USA; their entry into the country and all commercial and financial relations with the USA were frozen.

In Izmir, American clergyman Andrew Craig Brunson, who was asked to be sentenced to 35 years in prison for “committing crimes and spying on behalf of terrorist organizations” and is under house arrest, was sentenced to three years, one month, and 15 days in prison. Brunson was released with the sentence, and his house arrest and overseas ban was lifted. In the afternoon part of the hearing held at the Izmir 2nd High Criminal Court, the court board announced its decision, after the break.



While the delegation sentenced Brunson to three years, one month, and 15 days in prison pursuant to Article 220/7 of the TCK, it lifted the defendant's house arrest and the overseas ban with the provision. Lawyer İsmail Cem Halavurt stated that his client would go abroad after the electronic clamps were removed.

### **Syrian War; ISIS, PKK/PYD and Turkey's Operations and Relationships**

US-Turkey relations took serious blows until the Syrian crisis, there was a long standoff, but despite all the crises, mutual interests were outweighed in the last instance. As a result, bilateral relations have been repaired after each crisis and continued from where they left off. Even after the March 1 Memorandum crisis, the normalization process was started with mutual maneuvers and the relations reached the concept of "strategic partnership". But today, the turbulence that Turkey has entered with the Syrian crisis has taken on a different dimension than the others. Limited war and guerrilla warfare, including the civil war, are also observed in Syria today. Today, Syria is a devastated country where global powers are running wild. The US Administration has decided to establish a border security force to protect the Kurdish region in Syria (Arslan et al., 2018).

Turkey and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) have launched an operation to clear Dabiq, which is under the control of the terrorist group ISIS. After the operation, the US congratulated Turkey for clearing up ISIS elements in the region. On January 20, 2017, Turkey announced that border clearance against the terrorist organization ISIS would go as far as Al-Bab, and the US Administration announced that they do not prefer Turkey to stray into 20 kilometers across of the border. In February 2017, when Turkey realized that it had not hit the ISIS coordinates they had given the United States to hit, Turkish Armed forces (TAF) and FSA forces advanced on al-Bab in response to the US attitude to this situation. The operation was named Euphrates Shield (Arslan et al., 2018).

The city was cleared of the terrorist organization and the attempt of the PKK's subsidiary Democratic Union Party (PYD) to establish a terror corridor in the region was dealt a temporary blow. On March 3, 2017, Turkey demanded that the United States comply with its promises and that the terrorist organization PYD withdraw from Manbij. It was stated that Turkey would launch an operation in Manbij if deemed necessary. The US Administration also allowed Assad to come to terms with the PYD. This agreement included the surrender of the region between the Euphrates Shield and Manbij to regime forces on the occasion of Turkey's mobilization for Manbij. The aim was to prevent Turkey from directly attacking PYD forces and to do so, to force them to clash with the Syrian regime. This, in turn, meant that Turkey put more weight on its shoulders. By 25 April, Turkey had targeted the PYD/PKK terrorist group's bases in Syria. The operation on PKK targets in Karakoc dealt a heavy blow to the organization. The US Administration has sided with the PYD/PKK terrorist organization against NATO ally Turkey (Ward, 2019). In fact, senior US commanders visited Turkey's hit points with PKK terrorists.

On May 10, US President Donald Trump decided to give heavy weapons to the terrorist organization PYD/PKK, and on May 11, heavy weapons shipments began to be carried out. This has led to a major breakdown in relations between Turkey and the United States. On May 16, President Erdoğan paid a visit to the United States and met with Donald Trump at the White House. Erdogan has gone with agendas of cutting off support for the terrorist organization PKK and acting together with Turkey for the Raqqa operation. The first meeting of the new US President with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Washington did not give what Turkey demanded and did not resolve the complications between them. President Erdogan said that

Turkey would not be silent in the face of any attack on Turkish territory from the YPG and PYD, and that Turkey would respond by activating the rules of engagement, just like in Al-Bab and Cerablus. Supporters of the terrorist organization PKK/PYD attacked the Turkish group gathered in front of Turkey's Embassy in Washington, and US police did not prevent the situation. Turkish guards intervened and prevented the incident, but this incident was turned into the material and used by the US press and authorities in anti-Turkish propaganda. On August 30, a lawsuit was filed against the Turkish guards. The case has drawn Turkey's reaction. Another meeting of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Trump took place on September 22, 2017 in New York City, as part of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly meeting. Donald Trump said that "we became friends with him" for President Erdogan, and claimed they were better with Turkey than they had ever been (Oktav, 2019).

### **Olive Branch Operation**

In a statement, the Turkish Armed Forces described the goal of Operation Olive Branch as ensuring security and stability on Turkey's borders and in this region. As part of the operation, "to neutralize terrorists belonging to the PKK/KCK/PYD-YPG and Daesh in the Afrin region and to save the people of the friendly and fraternal region from their oppression and persecution" were also listed among the goals.

Turkey cleared 2,000 square kilometers from ISIS on the Syrian side of the border with Operation Euphrates Shield, which it organized in 2016. The area currently under the protection of the Turkish Armed Forces and under the control of the FSA extends from Azez in the west of the Euphrates River to Jarablus.

Operation Euphrates Shield not only eliminated the threat of ISIS on the Turkish border, it created a buffer zone between the two autonomous Kurdish regions of Afrin and Kobani and prevented the Kurds from forming a corridor in Syria that runs along the Turkish border. Turkey has also sent troops to Idlib in northwestern Syria. The region became one of the regions of non-conflict under the agreement signed between Turkey, Iran, and Russia in May 2017. Following the ceasefire agreement, the TAF entered Idlib in October 2017, and established observation posts. The deployment of troops to Idlib also enabled Turkey to have a military presence in the south of Afrin. Entering Afrin will be a continuation of Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield, as it aims to prevent the rise of Kurds in Syria (Arslan et al., 2018). In Afrin and just beyond the borders of Turkey, clashes between YPG and TSK have been ongoing for months.

The YPG took control of Afrin in 2012 and established a de facto autonomous administration. Turkey sees the YPG as an extension of the PKK. Ankara strongly opposes the establishment of an independent state on the other side of the border, because it is concerned about the separation of its own Kurdish population.

The Euphrates Shield and the Olive Branch will not only serve as an example of military success but also as a beacon of hope in the sad story of the Syrian crisis and an example for the re-stabilization of Syria politically, militarily, and economically. The FSA, which has been reorganized with the help of Turkey and has achieved great success, has become a center of attraction again and is growing and growing stronger every day. That is why a new wave of propaganda will come against both Turkey and the FSA.

Operation Olive Branch, launched by Turkey to prevent the YPG from creating a "terrorist corridor" in northern Syria, has caused tensions in bilateral relations with the United States to reach at the highest level. Differences in long-standing Syrian policy had turned into a strategic contrast, with the United States giving direct support to the YPG under the umbrella of the SDG. The most important reason why this strategic contrast could not be resolved was the gap between the two sides in the view of the YPG. Turkey rightly insists

that the YPG is the Syrian branch of the PKK, while Washington has continued to use the SDF against Daesh, despite the recognition of this link by top American officials (Oktav, 2019).

The Trump Administration, which has largely maintained the Obama administration's Syria policy, has failed to develop a new concept in the fight against Daesh. Leaving ample room for manoeuvres for the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), which has continued Obama's policy of working with "local forces", the Trump Administration has had trouble softening Turkey's response. We see that an approach that is content with superficial rhetoric about appreciating Turkey's national security concerns continues. Even if we assume that President Trump is willing to improve relations with Ankara in an individual sense, it is necessary to see that this will not be enough to eliminate the deep dispute over the YPG, which poses an existential threat to Turkey (Gegelashvili, 2020).

We can say that the Trump Administration has failed to create a comprehensive Syria policy and has difficulty legitimizing the ongoing American presence in post-DAESH Syria. Although Trump stated that the US will no longer provide weapons to the YPG, CENTCOM's announcement of the plan to create "border security forces" can be considered as a contradiction caused by this lack of policy. The fact that Secretary of State Tillerson stated that they did not want to repeat the mistake they made by leaving Iraq early in Syria issue and that they had to stay to break Iran's influence also points to the confusion over Syria. If it is remembered that the American presence in Syria is still possible with the permission obtained from Congress to combat terrorism after September 11, it is understood that the legal infrastructure of a new policy is not available. It is obvious that there is a Syria policy that is stuck in the fight against DAESH, its goals are unclear, its legal infrastructure is unclear, the Congress has no energy to question it, and it is largely left to CENTCOM (Oktav, 2019).

On the eve of the Raqqa operation, Turkey had gone to the Trump Administration with alternative plans, offering an opportunity for the United States to return to work with NATO ally Turkey. In an environment where the Trump administration has been plagued by many scandals in domestic policy, with its style of chaos management, it has chosen to leave the field in foreign policy and security affairs largely to the troops. Trump, who wanted success as soon as possible because he came to power with promises to destroy DAESH, listened to CENTCOM and decided to continue the relationship with the YPG and, moreover, to arm them directly. In this way, it became inevitable that the American side, which focused on the YPG's usefulness in the field against DAESH and preferred to ignore the organization's political goals, would have a crisis with Turkey. It is worth noting that the Trump administration, which does not agree with the alternative plans proposed by Turkey, has difficulty explaining its support for a terrorist organization that directly threatens its traditional NATO ally, although they give many reasons (Oktav, 2019).

### **Operation Spring Shield (OSS)**

Operation Spring Shield, launched after an airstrike on February 27 by the Assad regime against Turkish troops stationed in Idlib for a ceasefire observation mission in accordance with the Astana agreement, marked this year in Syria. Turkey, which has made great efforts to ensure a ceasefire in the region and avoid civilian exodus, launched an operation against the regime after the attack in Idlib, where 33 soldiers were killed on February 27 (Gegelashvili, 2020).

Declaring that the name of the operation was "Spring Shield" on March 1, Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar stated that,

With the right of self-defense in Article 51 of the UN Convention within the framework of the Adana, Astana and Sochi agreements, to provide a ceasefire, to prevent civilian exodus; we continue our activities in Idlib in order to end the humanitarian drama in the region and to ensure the security of our troops, people and borders.

The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), which effectively used UAVs and armed UAVs as part of the operation, soon inflicted heavy losses on regime elements. On March 4, the Ministry of National Defense (MSB) announced that it had destroyed three aircraft, eight helicopters, three UAVs, 151 tanks, 47 Cannon/howitzers, 52 MRLs, and eight air defense missile systems belonging to the regime and that the operation was continuing with determination. More than 3,300 regime elements were also neutralized as part of the operation.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin Palace on March 5 on the Idlib talks. After the negotiations, a ceasefire was agreed in Idlib. Details of the agreement reached in Moscow included the following:

“All military activities along the contact line in the Idlib Strain Relief Zone will be stopped as of 00.01 (tonight) on March 6, 2020”, “A safe corridor will be established 6 kilometers in the north and 6 kilometers in the south of the M4 highway. Detailed principles for the functioning of the Safe Corridor will be agreed between the Turkish and Russian Defense Ministries within 7 days”, and “Turkish and Russian patrols will be launched on March 15 along the section of the M4 road from Trumba (2 kilometers west of Serakib) to Ain Al havr” (Waldman, 2019).

Turkey has made a separate agreement with the United States and Russia while the peace Fountain operation, which it launched on October 9, 2019, continues. The United States, which promised that the YPG/PKK would withdraw from the area 30 kilometers deep from the Turkish border (Arslan et al., 2018), which the operation established as a safe zone, did not keep its promise.

From October 23, 2019, Russia also pledged that Russian military police and regime forces will enter the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border, which is outside the Operation Peace Spring zone, to ensure that YPG/PKK terrorists are taken 30 kilometers from the Turkish-Syrian border with their weapons. The Russians also promised that the terrorist group YPG/PKK terrorists would be removed from Manbij and Tel Rifat with their weapons. However, despite these agreements, the terrorist organization YPG/PKK continues its occupation by not withdrawing from the designated borders and areas.

The “Caesar Syria Civil Protection Act”, signed by US President Donald Trump on December 21, 2019, went into effect on June 17. By law, there are sanction penalties for helping the regime develop domestic oil production and for engaging in commercial relations with the regime. The United States threatens individuals and institutions that break the law with sanctions, such as a ban on travel to the country, a freeze on assets in the United States, and a ban on any financial transactions with other countries and companies (Gegelashvili, 2020).

Under the law, sanctions could be imposed on foreign individuals and organizations that provide support to the regime, contractor companies acting on behalf of Russia and Iran or exchange large amounts of money with them. Indeed, the US State Department announced on June 17 that it had placed 39 senior Syrian officials on its sanctions list, including Bashar al-Assad, his wife and brother, in the first wave of sanctions under the law. In the ongoing process, the US State Department has placed individuals, companies, military officials providing financial support to the Assad regime and some members of Parliament associated with the regime on the sanctions list (Oktav, 2019).

The terrorist organization YPG/PKK continues to trade oil with the Assad regime despite the US sanctions decision. The terrorist organization sells an average of 500 trucks of oil to the Assad regime region every day.

The US “partner” in the region, YPG/PKK, continues to violate US laws both by selling oil to the Assad regime and by trading with Husam Katircı, who is on the US Treasury Department’s sanction list. The US condones violations by not imposing sanctions on the YPG/PKK that violates the law.

### Conclusion

US-Turkey relations are based on mutual interest (Akhtar, 2021). This is the reason for all mutually given tolerances. Although the USA may not have such an obligation, the visible picture points to this. For this reason, the United States has never fully turned its back on Turkey, and we have never claimed that Turkey already has such a luxury; although, as with the issue of the March 1 petition, Turkey has let the United States down, in the words of the United States. As Turkey’s foreign policy has already developed within the framework of its relations with the United States, Turkey has had to maintain this balance. In this respect, we can compare the relationships to a graph of increasing and decreasing, ups and downs. However, today, compared to past issues, the Syrian crisis is interpreted as a more serious problem and the thought that the two countries can bring relations to an irreversible point has prevailed (Arslan et al., 2018).

The most important reason why Turkey’s contrast with the United States in Syria is interpreted as the “riskiest reversal” is that Turkey from time to time enters into limited war with an organization known to be armed and supported by the United States across the border, which the United States does not reject and which the Turkish side also considers a terrorist organization. In fact, Turkey has made a smart move against the United States with its Operation “Euphrates Shield” against ISIS in Al-Bab. Here, with this operation, Turkey exclaimed that I am in the game; it has divided the Kurdish cantons in two and fought with ISIS and cleared the border. Although the world’s media ignored Turkey’s operation against ISIS, it was the first time a NATO country had conducted a ground operation, rather than just bombing ISIS from the air. We know how well the world media plays three monkeys when it comes to Turkey. The self-confidence this operation brings to the TAF stands before us as another factor that should be underlined. This self-confidence has made Turkey more confident about the Olive Branch operation it will carry out in Afrin (Oktav, 2019).

As the United States conducts its relations with Turkey through the Middle East, Turkey’s foreign policy develops in correspondence with the framework of its relations with the United States. For example, Turkey’s efforts to strengthen its relations with Russia are aimed at limiting US activities in the region and showing that Turkey can do whatever it wants. However,

if US Congress still insists on continuing the current foreign policy implemented towards Turkey, this will lead more distance with west and further economic relations with China and Russia and ultimately lead to a politically unified Turkish state in a quicker pace as there is a potential for a completely different direction for Turkey as it has long been ongoing in the Turkish geography via “Turkish Council 2020-2025 Strategy” and “Turkish World 2040 Vision” (Turkkon, 2020) which has shed light on future cooperation within the Turkish world and its members will provide a framework for relations between states will deepen considerably in several areas. (Çora & Mikail, 2019, p. 174)

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