

Turkish-American and NATO Relations After the Embargo: Türkiye's Strategic Position in Light of NSSM 227, CIA, and NATO Defense Planning Documents (1974-1980)

Ambargo Sonrası Türk-Amerikan ve NATO İlişkileri:
NSSM 227, CIA ve NATO Savunma Planlama Belgeleri Işığında
Türkiye'nin Stratejik Konumu (1974-1980)

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Geliş Tarihi / Submitted:
17.09.2025

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted:
10.12.2025

Abstract

This study examines the effects of the American arms embargo imposed after the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation on Turkish-American relations and Türkiye's strategic position within NATO. The objective is to reassess the widely cited "crisis of confidence" thesis—often built on secondary interpretations—through primary documents, namely the U.S.'s National Security Council's National Security Study Memorandum 227 (NSSM 227) report (1975), the CIA's Interagency Memorandum (1975), and NATO Defense Planning documents (1973–1982). The research is based on systematic archival work conducted in 2023–2024, using U.S. presidential archives, CIA Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) releases, and NATO archives. The findings demonstrate that while Washington depicted Türkiye as an "unreliable but indispensable" ally, Brussels focused on military and economic deficiencies, framing Türkiye as a dependent yet critical partner. Ultimately, the study argues that Türkiye's position shifted from a "special ally" to a "compulsory partner" and that the embargo significantly amplified concerns about NATO's southern flank deterrence.

Keywords: Turkish-American Relations, NATO, Arms Embargo, NSSM 227, CIA, Türkiye's Strategic Position

Öz

Bu çalışma, 1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı sonrasında uygulanan Amerikan silah ambargosunun, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri ve Türkiye'nin NATO içindeki stratejik konumu üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, literatürde çoğunlukla ikincil yorumlara dayanan güven krizi tezini, ABD Ulusal Güvenlik Konseyi'nin NSSM 227 raporu (1975), CIA'nın Kuruluşlararası Bilgi Notu (1975) ve NATO Savunma Planlama belgeleri (1973–1982) ışığında birincil belgelerle yeniden değerlendirmektir. Çalışma, ABD ulusal arşivleri, Bilgiye Erişim Özgürlüğü Yasası kapsamında erişime açılan CIA belgeleri ve NATO arşivi üzerinden yapılan sistematik taramalara dayanmaktadır. Bulgular, ABD kurumsal raporlarının Türkiye'yi "güvenilmez ama vazgeçilmez" bir ortak olarak tanımlarken, NATO'nun ise ekonomik ve askeri kapasite eksikliklerine odaklandığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, Türkiye'nin söz konusu dönemde "özel müttefik" konumundan "zorunlu ortak" kimliğine evrildiğini ve ambargonun NATO'nun güney kanadındaki caydırıcılığa yönelik riskleri artırdığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri, NATO, Ambargo, NSSM 227, CIA, Türkiye'nin Stratejik Konumu

Introduction

The United States (U.S.) arms embargo imposed following the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation is widely recognized in the literature as a turning point in Turkish-American relations. According to the prevailing view, the embargo led to a lasting crisis of trust between the two countries and played a decisive role in shaping the trajectory of bilateral relations in the long term.¹ However, this prevailing approach has largely been constructed based on political discourse in Türkiye, public reactions, and secondary sources. In this context, George Harris, in his 1976 article, emphasized the crisis of trust caused by the embargo and the shift in Ankara's perception of Washington.² Dankwart Rustow's work *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally* emphasized Türkiye's strategic indispensability for the U.S.; however, it also demonstrated that this indispensability did not eliminate political tensions between the two countries.³ Prominent scholars such as William Hale and Feroz Ahmad have examined the orientations of Turkish foreign policy in the 1970s in detail, with particular attention to the rise of anti-American sentiment in Turkish public opinion as a result of the embargo.⁴ Although Frank Schimmelfennig's works have focused on the context of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement and the broader security order, they have not addressed Türkiye's military capacity issues during the 1970s.⁵

This study re-evaluates the prevailing approach through an analysis of primary documents. Its originality lies in the comparative examination of sources from three distinct institutional levels. These include the U.S. National Security Council's (NSC's) National Security Study Memorandum 227 (NSSM 227) documents in 1975, the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA's) Interagency Memorandum prepared in the same year, and NATO's defense planning reports. These documents reveal that the embargo had effects on more than just bilateral relations; it also had effects on NATO's planning for collective security.

Indeed, NSSM 227 describes Türkiye as an ally whose “*reliability is in question*”, while simultaneously noting the “*indispensability*” of its bases and geographical location.⁶ The CIA's Interagency Memorandum, on the other hand, documented the direct military consequences of the embargo, emphasizing that the deterrent capacity of the Turkish Armed Forces was rapidly deteriorating due to a lack of modern equipment, insufficient stockpiles, and inflation.⁷ The NATO documents, while detailing deficiencies in the land, air, and naval forces, explicitly stated that “substantial external assistance” was necessary to maintain deterrence.⁸

Undoubtedly, other international political developments of the period also influenced this approach. In particular, within the context of Greece's withdrawal from the military flank of NATO and the Warsaw Pact's increased presence in the Mediterranean in 1975, NATO

1 Oral Sander, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkileri*, İmge Kitabevi, Ankara, 1998, p. 245-247.

2 George S. Harris, “The Arms Embargo and Turkey”, *Middle East Journal* 30:2, 1976, 129-143.

3 Dankwart Alexander Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1987.

4 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774* Routledge, London, 2000; Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950–1975*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1977.

5 Frank Schimmelfennig, *NATO and the European Security Order: History, Theory, and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2018.

6 NSSM 227: U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey, 1975, National Security Council, Box 37, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

7 CIA, Turkey After the US Arms Cutoff, Interagency Memorandum, 1975, CIA Records (CREST), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia>, accessed 20.03.2024.

8 NATO Archives, “Defence Review Committee Working Paper” (DRC/WP/74/2), 1974, “Defence Planning Committee Report” (DPC/D/76/2), 1976, s. 12; “Force Planning Country Study: Turkey”, 1973–1982, NATO Archives Online, accessed 12.03.2025.

documents identified Türkiye as the keystone of the southeastern flank and emphasized that this role could not be sustained without external assistance. As a result, this study reveals not only the crisis of trust in bilateral relations with the U.S. but also NATO's reflex and effort to support Türkiye within the framework of collective security, based on primary sources.

Therefore, while the frequently asserted thesis in Türkiye that “the embargo created a rupture in Turkish-American relations” is confirmed in this study, it is also documented in a multi-layered manner through U.S. institutional documents and NATO documents. In this context, the article re-examines the period between 1974 and 1980 as a transformative process in which Türkiye's position within the Western alliance shifted from a “special relationship” to a “compelled ally”.

The concepts of “special relationship” and “compelled ally” employed in this study are analytical interpretations derived from contemporary documents rather than terms explicitly stated within them. The term “special relationship” describes the special treatment the U.S. gave Türkiye during the Cold War, which included military aid, base privileges, and political coordination. However, post-1974 documents indicate a deterioration of this status, revealing Türkiye's transition into a new position that can be described as a “compelled partner”. This concept is derived from statements arguing that even though there were issues with reliability and capacity, Türkiye's geographic location and its critical role on the southeastern flank made it impossible for the country to leave the alliance.

Aiming to examine Türkiye's position within the Western alliance during the period 1974–1980, this study primarily relies on archival documents and declassified official reports. The U.S. NSC's National Security Study Memorandum 227 (NSSM 227—“U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey” [Box:37], 1975) and the Central Intelligence Agency's report titled “Interagency Memorandum: Turkey After the US Arms Cutoff (1975)” were obtained through the CIA Reading Room and the National Archives. Documents belonging to NATO's Defence Planning Committee, such as the Defence Review Committee Working Paper (DRC/WP/74/2, 1974), Defence Planning Committee Document (DPC/D/76/2, 1976), and the Force Planning Document on Turkey (1973–1982), were accessed via the NATO Archives online catalog and related declassified sources.

The documents utilized in this study were obtained through systematic digital archival searches conducted between 2023 and 2024. The U.S. presidential archives, CIA reports released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and defense planning documents made available online by the NATO archives were thoroughly reviewed, with assessments regarding Türkiye's strategic position directly extracted from relevant sections of these records. Additionally, American presidential documents from the period—such as the Johnson Letter, Ford's veto message, and statements by the Carter administration to Congress—were examined via the U.S. National Archives and Presidential Libraries collections. In addition to primary sources, the contributions of renowned scholars such as George Harris, Dankwart Rustow, William Hale, Feroz Ahmad, and Frank Schimmelfennig in the secondary literature have also been taken into account. This approach ensures that the study offers an original contribution grounded not only in secondary interpretations but directly based on archival documents.

1. Historical Roots of the Alliance

The 1947 Truman Doctrine began the shaping and institutionalization of Turkish-American relations within the context of the Cold War. By committing to provide a total of 400 million dollars in military and economic aid to Türkiye and Greece, the U.S. aimed to prevent these

two countries from falling under Soviet influence.⁹ These aid programs brought about a profound transformation in Türkiye's security system, serving as a critical resource for the modernization of the military and the reconstruction of the economy. Türkiye's accession to NATO in 1952 further consolidated this process. Türkiye's geostrategic position within NATO's southern flank was considered indispensable for establishing deterrence against the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Within this framework, the U.S. established over twenty military facilities in Türkiye, with Incirlik Air Base becoming one of Washington's most critical bases throughout the Cold War.¹¹ By the late 1950s, Turkish-American relations had reached a level of close cooperation that can be described as a "special relationship". Some sources note that Türkiye possessed the second-largest military force within NATO after the U.S. and was an integral part of the Alliance's collective defense posture—an arrangement that represented a significant contribution to the collective security efforts, including those led by the U.S.¹²

The 1960s had profound effects within the context of Türkiye's domestic political developments. Specifically, the military coup of May 27, 1960, significantly impacted not only Türkiye's internal politics but also its foreign policy. In the post-coup period, the rise of left-leaning, nationalist discourses brought greater visibility to the presence of American military forces in Türkiye.¹³ During this period, although dependency on U.S. aid continued, skepticism toward the idea of "unconditional commitment" to the West began to grow among both the Turkish public and political elites. The first major rupture in relations occurred with the 1964 Johnson Letter. In response to escalating tensions in Cyprus and Ankara's potential intervention plans, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson sent a letter asserting that Türkiye could not use American weapons without permission and emphasizing the uncertainty of NATO's response in the event of a Soviet attack.¹⁴ These statements deeply undermined the trust of Turkish decision-makers in the U.S., solidifying the perception that "the U.S. may abandon Türkiye when most needed." In the aftermath of the Johnson Letter, while Türkiye maintained its NATO membership, it began to seek diversification in its foreign policy options. Within this framework, economic and technical cooperation projects with the Soviet Union came to the forefront, marking the first signs of Ankara's search for alternatives to its alignment with the West.¹⁵

In the early 1970s, the Cyprus issue and the ban on poppy cultivation became central points of contention in Turkish-American relations. The relationship experienced its most severe rupture after Türkiye conducted the Cyprus Peace Operation in response to the Greek-backed coup on July 15, 1974. Simultaneously, the U.S. identified poppy cultivation in Türkiye as a primary source of its domestic drug problem and pressured Ankara to prohibit the production of this strategically important crop. The Cyprus intervention and the poppy cultivation issue formed the core of bilateral tensions. The U.S. regarded Türkiye's use of American-supplied weapons during the Cyprus operation as a violation of existing agreements. Moreover, Türkiye's firm stance on the poppy cultivation issue prompted the

9 Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2007, p. 132.

10 Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1987, 45.

11 George S. Harris, *Troubled Alliance: Turkish-American Problems in Historical Perspective, 1945–1971* American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C., 1972, p. 88, 89.

12 Birol Akduman, "NATO's Southern Flank: The Evolution of Türkiye's Strategic Role and Its Implications for Regional Security", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 12:5, p. 2951.

13 Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950–1975*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1977, p. 241, 242.

14 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*, Routledge, London, 2000, 168.

15 Ibid.

U.S. Congress to impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Türkiye on February 5, 1975.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, domestic public opinion in the U.S. also played a significant role in the adoption of this decision.¹⁷ In particular, the convergence of Greek, Greek Cypriot, and Armenian lobbies around an anti-Turkish stance, and the pressure they exerted on the Ford administration, played a significant role in influencing the U.S. Congress's decision. President Ford repeatedly warned the Congress about the “extremely serious consequences” of such measures and pushed for the restoration of military sales and credits to Türkiye, stressing the importance of supporting a key NATO ally.¹⁸ Indeed, despite President Ford's two veto attempts, the Congress overrode the vetoes and enacted the arms embargo on Türkiye into law.¹⁹ President Ford, for his part, described the embargo as “*the single most irresponsible and shortsighted foreign policy action taken by the Congress during all the years I have been in Washington*”.²⁰ The arms embargo imposed on Türkiye sparked significant disagreement within U.S. domestic politics and public opinion. Both the Ford and Carter administrations increasingly argued that the embargo was detrimental to the vital interests of the U.S. and NATO and even Israel's security. In this context, particularly under the influence of evolving regional developments and dynamics, President Carter quickly shifted away from his initially pro-embargo stance. A telling example of this shift was provided by Carter's advisor, Clark Clifford, who—after meeting with members of the Congress—noted that they were “shockingly indifferent” to the long-term implications for U.S.–Greece or U.S.–Türkiye relations, or to the potential loss of Turkish bases.²¹

In summary, while the embargo and the Cyprus issue may have benefited certain candidates in U.S. domestic politics—particularly during presidential elections—they severely strained Washington's relations with its NATO allies, namely Türkiye and Greece. These developments created uncertainty over the future of U.S. bases in Türkiye and jeopardized American security interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. In retaliation for the embargo, Türkiye refused the return of U.S. nuclear delivery systems, declared the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus, lifted the poppy cultivation ban, froze the status of U.S. military bases, and ultimately annulled the 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement.²²

Throughout 1977 and 1978, the Carter administration engaged in an intense struggle with the Congress to resolve the issue of the arms embargo on Türkiye. While the administration sought to advance a Defense Cooperation Agreement with Ankara, a group of influential members of the Congress staunchly opposed lifting the embargo unless Türkiye made tangible progress on the Cyprus issue. The fact that Türkiye had exploited a loophole to procure arms through NATO's supply agency further intensified this opposition. Over

16 U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 94th Congress, House of Representatives, 1975, p. 1 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house>, accessed 20.03.2024.; Macide Başlamışlı “ABD'nin Türkiye'ye Yönelik Ambargo Kararına İlişkin Haşhaş Sorunu Yerine 1974 Kıbrıs Krizini Ön Plana Çıkarma Girişimi”, *Asia Minor Studies*, 9:1, 2021, p. 695.

17 James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics (Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace)*, University Press of Kentucky, 2020, p. 19.

18 NARA, Turkey (1), Box:125, July 25, 1975, The Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 NARA, “Turkey” (1), Box:125, July 25, 1975, The Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

22 Serhat Güvenç, Soli Özel, “NATO and Turkey in the post-Cold War world: between abandonment and entrapment”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* Vol. 12, No. 4, December 2012, 535,536; Ayşe Ömür Atmaca, “The Alliance in the Storm: Geopolitical Representation of the United States in the Turkish Parliament during Détente”, *All Azimuth*, V14, N1, 2025), 116.

time, President Carter, who had come to support the Defense Cooperation Agreement, recognized both the difficulty of securing congressional approval and the urgency of restoring U.S.–Türkiye relations. As a result, he strategically decided to pursue the unconditional lifting of the embargo. This shift in approach was informed by lessons learned during the administration's experience with the Panama Canal treaties and led to the planning of a broad lobbying campaign. However, the Greek-American lobby's influence and ongoing concerns about human rights in Cyprus continued to fuel the opposition.²³ The aforementioned reports and analyses undoubtedly influenced the shift in strategy.

The embargo had a more tangible impact on Türkiye. Specifically, it directly disrupted the modernization of the Turkish military. Since 1950, American aid to Türkiye had exceeded a total value of three billion dollars, resulting in over 90% of the Turkish Armed Forces becoming dependent on weapons systems originating from the U.S.²⁴ Certainly, with the implementation of the embargo, Türkiye entered a severe military bottleneck. In response, Türkiye suspended the 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement, reclassifying U.S. military facilities on its soil to a “temporary status”, thereby compelling Washington to engage in new negotiations.²⁵ The embargo not only strained Turkish-American relations but also prompted a reexamination of Türkiye's role within NATO. While Turkish decision-makers reaffirmed their commitment to the alliance, the bilateral crisis with the U.S. necessitated a reassessment of Türkiye's position within NATO. During this period, NATO documents increasingly emphasized Türkiye's military capacity shortfalls and its dependence on external assistance. In this context, the 1975 National Security Study Memorandum 227 (NSSM 227) and NATO defense planning documents from 1974 to 1976 emerged as critical texts that redefined Türkiye's standing within the Western alliance.

2. Türkiye in the U.S. Institutional Documents: NSSM 227 and the CIA Interagency Memorandum (1975)

The U.S. arms embargo prompted both countries to reassess their existing bilateral relations. Following the embargo decision, American policymakers received a significant strategic warning from the effective suspension of the 1969 Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) and the reclassification of U.S. military facilities in Türkiye to a “temporary status”.²⁶ In this context, the U.S. NSC prepared the National Security Study Memorandum 227 (NSSM 227—U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey) in 1975 to examine Türkiye's future position, alliance commitments, and potential foreign policy orientations.²⁷

As a result, the NSSM 227 report acknowledged Türkiye's continued strategic importance on the southern flank of the Cold War while identifying the emerging trust crisis in bilateral relations as a lasting problem. The report emphasized the following key points:

23 James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace*, University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 2020, 121.

24 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, 1974), <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, 5, accessed 12.03.2025.

25 James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace*, University Press of Kentucky, 2020, 121.

26 James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace*, University Press of Kentucky, 2020, 121.

27 U.S. National Security Council, NSSM 227: U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey, 1975, Box 37, The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

- Loss of Trust in the U.S.: The report states that the embargo “irreversibly undermined” Ankara’s confidence in Washington.²⁸ Turkish decision-makers were expected to maintain their commitment to NATO; however, the report indicated that efforts to reduce dependency on the West and explore alternative options would likely intensify in the future.²⁹
- Priority of Military Facilities: The U.S. bases and installations in Türkiye were classified according to their strategic value. İncirlik Air Base was designated as a “critical priority” facility, while the NATO air headquarters in İzmir, logistical centers in Ankara, and fuel depots in İskenderun were listed as secondary in importance. Smaller radar and communication sites were noted as potentially subject to closure if necessary.³⁰
- Dependency of the Turkish Armed Forces: It was emphasized that American aid provided between 1950 and 1974 exceeded three billion dollars and that over 90% of the Turkish military’s inventory was dependent on U.S.-origin systems.³¹ This situation was considered a factor preventing Türkiye from severing ties with the U.S. in the short term.
- The scenario in which Türkiye might seek security cooperation with Iran, Pakistan, and the Muslim world in the event of losing trust in the West was discussed. This is one of the rare instances in which U.S. documents explicitly acknowledge Türkiye’s potential shift toward “non-Western options”.³²
- In this context, the NSSM 227 report identified four possible policy options that Washington might pursue as follows:
 - to sign a new Defense Cooperation Agreement that meets Türkiye’s demands.
 - to prepare a package that prioritizes U.S. interests but includes partial concessions.
 - to employ a delaying strategy to buy time.
 - to reduce the American presence in Türkiye and retain only critical facilities.³³

These options demonstrate that the U.S. employed a flexible and multifaceted bargaining strategy in its relations with Türkiye. The most striking conclusion of the report is that Türkiye was redefined in U.S. documents, no longer as a “special ally”, but rather as an “unreliable yet indispensable” partner. Washington acknowledged that trust in Türkiye had been irreparably damaged; however, due to its geographical position and military installations, Ankara was emphasized as a strategically critical actor that could not be lost.³⁴

The consequences of the American embargo manifested not only at the political level but also became markedly evident in the military sphere. One of the clearest documents illustrating this situation is the 1975 CIA report titled Interagency Memorandum: Turkey

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: “Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, 1974”, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

32 U.S. National Security Council, NSSM 227, Box 37, The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

33 Ibid.

34 Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America’s Forgotten Ally*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1987, 112.

After the US Arms Cutoff.³⁵ This report provides a detailed examination of Türkiye's dependence on U.S. military equipment and the impact of the U.S. aid cutoff on Türkiye's military capabilities. Unlike NSSM 227, this report does not focus on Türkiye's political reliability but rather directly addresses the effects of the embargo on its military capacities. Nonetheless, the report analyzes Türkiye's reliance on American military hardware, the potential consequences of the embargo, and possible Turkish responses. In particular, it emphasizes that the embargo could undermine Türkiye's role within NATO and potentially lead the country toward inwardness and isolation.³⁶ The report also considers the possibility that Türkiye may seek alternative external sources to meet its military needs, which could, in turn, affect its relations with Western European countries. While Turkish policymakers were reportedly angered and surprised by the embargo, an immediate reaction was not anticipated. However, the report suggests that should the embargo persist, Türkiye would likely undertake gradual retaliatory measures against the U.S.³⁷ Here lies a critical warning:

*"If European allies fail to meet Turkey's fundamental military needs, the Turks may interpret this as a form of 'de facto isolation from NATO,' potentially resulting in 'internal withdrawal' and a 'turn towards local conservatism,' which could pose significant challenges for Turkey's economic future and its role in Southern Europe."*³⁸

Another notable point concerns the factors Türkiye would consider while seeking ways to mitigate the effects of the embargo, such as "the inevitable impact of the U.S. aid cutoff, the pursuit of alternative sources for military equipment, and the durability of its current orientation towards the West".³⁹ Understandably, as an intelligence report, this document also anticipated that the embargo would have major consequences regarding intelligence-gathering capabilities.⁴⁰ As a result, the report warned that if the embargo persisted, it could severely undermine the operational capabilities of U.S. forces in the region and jeopardize critical intelligence-gathering programs. The most crucial emphasis of the report was the risk of weakening deterrence on NATO's southern flank. Indeed, intelligence circles emphasized that the embargo posed a threat not only to bilateral relations but to the entire foundation of the alliance's collective defense.⁴¹

In conclusion, a comparison between NSSM 227 and the CIA's Interagency Memorandum reveals clear differences in institutional priorities within the U.S. administration. While NSSM 227, prepared by the NSC, primarily assesses Türkiye through the lens of political reliability—noting a decline in Ankara's dependence on Washington following the Cyprus intervention and the arms embargo, and thus suggesting a reassessment of Türkiye's role within the alliance—the CIA report adopts a different perspective by focusing directly on military capacity. The latter document provides a detailed account of deficiencies in modern equipment, structural obsolescence within the armed forces, and the deterrent effects of economic constraints, emphasizing that Türkiye cannot meet NATO standards without external assistance. When read together, these documents demonstrate that U.S. decision-making bodies define the same ally from different vantage points: for the NSC, Türkiye's main issue is reliability, whereas for the CIA, it is a matter of insufficient capacity. This

35 CIA Interagency Memorandum "Turkey After the US Arms Cutoff", CIA Records (CREST), CIA-RDP80M01066A001100020011-8, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia>. accessed, 20.03.2024.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

divergence underscores the multifaceted nature of Türkiye's role within the alliance, which cannot be reduced to a single approach.

3. NATO Defense Documents and Türkiye's Concerns (1974–1976)

While U.S. institutional documents emphasize the trust deficit concerning Türkiye, the political costs of the arms embargo, and intelligence vulnerabilities, NATO reports focus more on military capacity and economic constraints. Although these two perspectives employ different terminologies, they converge on the same historical conclusion: Türkiye remains a problematic yet indispensable ally. Consequently, institutional assessments in Washington have confirmed, both politically and militarily, that Türkiye has become a contentious actor within the Western alliance. When the U.S. arms embargo came into effect, NATO documents increasingly emphasized Türkiye's military capacity challenges and dependence on external assistance. The Alliance deemed Türkiye's role in securing the alliance's southeastern flank indispensable, but it explicitly acknowledged that Ankara could not finance this role alone.⁴² In this context, a prominent theme in NATO's defense planning documents was the alliance's assessment of Türkiye not merely as an ally but as a "critical infrastructural element" essential for deterrence along the southeastern flank. These documents provide detailed accounts of the degradation observed across all branches of the Turkish Armed Forces due to the embargo and economic constraints. Notable issues included an imbalance between armor and anti-armor capabilities, insufficient maneuverability, and personnel shortages in the Army; limited numbers of modern aircraft and a lack of electronic warfare capabilities in the Air Force; and the designation of over half of the fleet's destroyers as "obsolescent," i.e., functionally outdated, in the Navy.⁴³

What distinguishes NATO's approach is that these assessments were not merely presented as a situational analysis. The documents clearly stated that Türkiye would be unable to close these gaps using its own economic resources; the solution was concretized through the concept of "substantial external assistance." Furthermore, it was emphasized that this assistance should not be one-time but rather "continuous, coordinated, and multidimensional." It was also noted that the alliance's other members, international financial institutions, and the U.S. needed to act collectively to support Türkiye.⁴⁴ NATO positioned itself not only as a military command structure but also as a "catalyst" responsible for coordinating external assistance.⁴⁵

3.1. DRC/WP/74/2 (1974 Defence Committee Working Paper)

The 1974 study report by NATO's Defence Review Committee (DRC/WP/74/2) provided a comprehensive assessment of Türkiye's force structure and requirements for the period 1975–1980:⁴⁶

- The report emphasized imbalances between armored units and air defense capabilities. The absence of electronic warfare (EW) equipment was noted as a significant factor limiting the effectiveness of the land forces.

42 NATO Defence Planning Committee, DPC/D/76/2: Defence Planning 1976–1980, <https://archives.nato.int/nato-defence-planning-1976-1980-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

43 NATO Force Planning Document on Turkey, 1973–1982, NATO Archives Online, accessed 12.03.2025.

44 NATO Archives, Defence Planning Committee Report (DPC/D/76/2), <https://archives.nato.int/nato-defence-planning-1976-1980-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

45 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey (Brussels: NATO Archives, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025).

46 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: "Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey" <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025, 1974.

- The introduction of F-4 and F-104S aircraft was regarded as a positive development; however, insufficient stocks of ammunition and spare parts were identified as key issues undermining operational effectiveness.
- It was stressed that more than half of the Turkish Navy's fleet consisted of outdated destroyers, and the acquisition of three submarines and six missile boats would only provide a limited increase in deterrence.
- The personnel strength of Category A units within the land forces corresponded to 60–65% of NATO Allied Command Europe (ACE) standards, which was recorded as a serious shortfall in terms of deterrence capability.⁴⁷

The report's most critical emphasis is that it is "impossible" for Türkiye to achieve its force objectives solely with national resources. The document explicitly states that without "substantial external military and economic assistance," the deterrence capability of NATO's southern flank would collapse.⁴⁸

3.2. DPC/D/76/2 (1976 Defence Planning Committee Document)

The Defence Planning Committee Document (DPC/D/76/2), prepared in 1976—while the embargo was still in effect—reassessed Türkiye's position within NATO at a strategic level:⁴⁹

- Türkiye's Strategic Role: Türkiye is described as the "cornerstone of the southern flank against the Soviet Union."
- Economic Insufficiencies: It is emphasized that Türkiye's economic resources are insufficient to meet NATO's force targets.
- Expectations of Allies: The report notes that not only the U.S., but also other allies must also assume responsibility in order for Türkiye to fulfill its obligations.
- Impact of the Embargo: The embargo is said to have weakened not only bilateral relations but also the alliance's overall deterrent capability—this point is explicitly stated in the report.⁵⁰

3.3. Force Planning Documents (1973–1982)

NATO's force planning reports from the 1973–1982 period provided a quantitative assessment of Türkiye's modernization efforts and existing deficiencies:⁵¹

- Capability Gains: The integration of F-4 Phantom II aircraft into the Turkish Air Force's inventory, coupled with the acquisition of three submarines and six missile boats by the Turkish Navy, represented a marginal but noteworthy enhancement in Türkiye's overall deterrence posture.
- Persistent Deficiencies: More than half of the Turkish Navy's fleet remained composed of obsolete platforms, with continued shortfalls in munitions stockpiles and spare parts availability. Additionally, the absence of robust EW systems

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ NATO Defence Planning Committee, DPC/D/76/2, <https://archives.nato.int/nato-defence-planning-1976-1980-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

⁵⁰ NATO Defence Planning Committee, DPC/D/76/2, <https://archives.nato.int/nato-defence-planning-1976-1980-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

⁵¹ NATO, Force Planning Review, 1973–1982: Country Chapter on Turkey (Brussels: NATO Archives), NATO Archives Online, accessed 12.03.2025.

constituted a critical operational gap, undermining the effectiveness of combined arms operations.

- Force Structure Constraints: The manpower levels within Türkiye's Category A land force units remained substantially below NATO force generation benchmarks, significantly limiting their capacity to contribute to the Alliance's deterrence and defense objectives on the southeastern flank.⁵²
- When considered together, these documents and reports reveal a fundamental duality in NATO's approach to Türkiye:
- Türkiye is a "high-cost" ally, requiring continuous external military and economic support.
- Nonetheless, its geographic location renders it indispensable.

Therefore, NATO deemed assistance and support mechanisms essential to prevent Türkiye from drifting away from the alliance and to maintain the deterrence capability of the southeastern flank.

In conclusion, while U.S. documents emphasize the trust deficit regarding Türkiye and the political costs imposed by the embargo, NATO reports focus more technically on military capacity issues and economic constraints. This difference reveals that Washington assesses Türkiye primarily through the lens of a "political reliability problem," whereas Brussels views it as a "military capability gap." Nevertheless, despite the differing terminology, both perspectives point to the same historical conclusion: Türkiye is a problematic yet indispensable ally.

The distinctive contribution of NATO reports lies in their concretization of Türkiye's position within the alliance on a cost-benefit basis. Reports prepared during the period when the U.S. embargo came into effect explicitly noted that the Turkish Armed Forces' modernization needs could not be met through national resources alone and that achieving NATO standards without external assistance was impossible. Thus, institutional assessments within NATO acknowledged Ankara's indispensability in the alliance's southeastern flank while simultaneously affirming that sustaining this role necessitated external support mechanisms.

4. Security Concerns Regarding Türkiye's NATO Commitment and Potential Shift Away from the West in U.S. Institutional Documents

Another notable concern emphasized in these documents pertains to the potential countermeasures Türkiye might undertake following the embargo. Within this framework, Türkiye's possible rapprochement with actors and alliances outside NATO and the Western bloc emerges as a key worry in both the NSSM 227 and CIA reports. Specifically, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, and India were identified as prominent alternative centers of power during that period, and the prospect of Türkiye developing defense procurement relationships with one or more of these countries was viewed as a security risk by the U.S. Consequently, the potential weakening of NATO ties, frustrations over Türkiye's position within the Western alliance, the pursuit of alternative security and defense arrangements, the risk of political isolation, and the turn toward non-Western sources of military supply were all categorized as major security concerns from the U.S. perspective.

⁵² Ibid.

4.1. The Potential Weakening of Türkiye's NATO Ties

In the NSSM report, it is emphasized that, in the event of a prolonged U.S. arms embargo, Türkiye would conduct a fundamental reassessment of whether it can rely on other Allies as its primary suppliers. The report states as follows:

*"The Turkish military appears to be pessimistic about its ability to fill its short-term needs from non-US sources. In the future, if the US cut-off is prolonged, Turkey will probably make a basic assessment of whether it can rely on other Allies as its major suppliers. Such an assessment will have major implications for Turkey's future role in NATO—either formally (in terms of steps to loosen its NATO ties) or de facto, by becoming dependent in some significant part on Eastern or other non-NATO sources, such as Iran, Pakistan, or Japan."*⁵³

The report further indicates that Türkiye's evaluation in this regard would have "significant consequences" for its future role within NATO. This could manifest either officially, through steps that weaken its NATO ties, or de facto, by becoming substantially dependent on non-NATO sources such as the Eastern Bloc, Iran, Pakistan, or Japan.⁵⁴

This concern essentially reflects the strategic dilemma Türkiye faced during the embargo period. On one hand, Türkiye aimed to remain within NATO and maintain its dependence on the West; on the other hand, it sought alternative sources to meet its immediate needs. After 1975, Türkiye made limited procurement attempts from European allies such as the United Kingdom and Germany; however, these efforts proved insufficient to match the volume and diversity of supplies previously provided by the U.S.⁵⁵ Therefore, the possibility of "dependence on non-NATO sources" articulated in NSSM 227 remained a strategic warning within the context of the period, but it also served as a significant indication of how Türkiye's pursuit of alternatives could exacerbate tensions within the Western alliance.

4.2. Türkiye's Disillusionment and the Pursuit of Alternative Security Arrangements

In the long term, Türkiye's disappointment with the U.S. is likely to impact the country's security arrangements, as the NSSM 227 points out:

*"In the longer term, Turkish disillusionment with the U.S. could intensify a process of basic reappraisal by Turkey of its security arrangements, including a search for new arrangements beyond NATO, possibly including Iran and the Muslim world."*⁵⁶

The statement reflects a deep-seated potential change encompassing both Türkiye's defense supply strategies and its broader security posture. In fact, during the latter half of the 1970s, Türkiye increased its participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meetings and sought to revitalize bilateral relations with Iran and Pakistan; however, these initiatives did not evolve into an alternative security architecture to NATO. Consequently, this forecast in NSSM 227 reflects Washington's concerns regarding Türkiye's possible pursuit of options outside the Western alliance. From the U.S. perspective, such a shift was

53 U.S. National Security Council, NSSM 227: U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey, Box 37, U.S. "Security Policy toward Turkey", The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

54 Ibid.

55 George Harris, "Turkey and the U.S. Arms Embargo of 1975-1978," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8, no. 4, 1976, s. 413-433; Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 1987, 87-95.

56 U.S. National Security Council, NSSM 227: U.S. Security Policy Toward Turkey, Box 37, U.S. "Security Policy toward Turkey", The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, accessed 20.03.2024.

perceived as a strategic threat not only to Türkiye's military procurement preferences but also to the integrity of NATO's southern flank.⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, this shift also constitutes a legitimate source of concern for the U.S.

4.3. *The Risk of Türkiye's Isolation*

Another relevant U.S. institutional document, the CIA report, states that if European allies fail to meet Türkiye's essential military needs, the Turks may interpret this situation as a form of "de facto isolation from NATO," potentially resulting in "inward isolation" and a reversion to "local conservatism".⁵⁸ This statement reflects the concern that, in the absence of external assistance, Türkiye may feel isolated, potentially weakening its ties with the West. This assessment indicates a direct correlation between the rising nationalist-conservative discourse in Turkish politics during the mid-1970s and the country's foreign policy orientation.⁵⁹ Such a scenario raised concerns not only about Türkiye's potential isolation within NATO but also about the erosion of a Western-aligned identity in the alliance's southern flank. From the U.S. perspective, this possibility signified a risk of weakening in terms of both arms procurement and Türkiye's ideological commitment to the Western alliance.⁶⁰

4.4. *Pursuit of Alternative Supply Sources.*

In the event that Türkiye fails to compensate for the loss of U.S. supplies through procurement from other NATO allies, it is noted that the country may seek alternative sources of external support—such as from Arab states—although such efforts may ultimately prove insufficient to meet its needs.⁶¹ Although the report does not explicitly mention any country by name, it is evident that Libya was the primary concern. Subsequent developments would reveal that Libya provided a certain level of support to Türkiye during this challenging period.⁶²

This situation illustrates, on the one hand, Türkiye's capacity to pursue alternative, non-NATO sources while maintaining its obligatory alliance commitments; on the other hand, it signals a development that could undermine the strategic coherence of the alliance from the U.S.'s perspective.

5. *The Contradiction between Bilateral Tensions and Collective Security Commitments (1974–1976)*

There are certain contradictions between these documents analyzed in the previous sections. These contradictions are evident in the tensions in bilateral relations between the U.S. and Türkiye and in the Alliance's collective security commitments. The institutional documents produced in the aftermath of the embargo show that Washington and NATO approached their assessments of Türkiye within the same crisis context but through distinctly different conceptual lenses. United States documents foreground the erosion of trust evident in bilateral relations and the strategic implications of this shift, whereas NATO reports focus on how weaknesses in Türkiye's military capacity affected the integrity of the Alliance's southeastern defense.

57 George Harris, "Turkey and the U.S. Arms Embargo of 1975–1978," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 8, no. 4 1976, 425–426; Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), 92.

58 CIA Interagency Memorandum: "Turkey After the US Arms Cutoff", accessed 20.03.2024.

59 Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy, 1950–1975*, London: C. Hurst, 1977, 311–329; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* I.B. Tauris, London, 2004), 243–252.

60 CIA Interagency Memorandum: "Turkey After the US Arms Cutoff", 1975, accessed 20.03.2024.

61 Ibid.

62 Türkiye Gazetesi, "Kıbrıs'ta da Libya ile omuz omuzaydık!", 25.07 2025.

5.1. Contrasting Approaches of the U.S. and NATO

During the Cold War, the U.S. approach to the Cyprus issue was often described as “constructive ambiguity”.⁶³ NATO's southeastern flank occupied a strategically critical position, directly affecting Soviet access to sea and air routes and thus constituting a vulnerable part of U.S. security.⁶⁴ This led the U.S. to avoid taking a clear-cut position between its key allies, Türkiye and Greece. Following the 1974 intervention, rising anti-American sentiment in Greece and its withdrawal from NATO's military command temporarily prompted the U.S. to tilt its balance in favor of Türkiye.⁶⁵ However, this adjustment reflected not an explicit support for Türkiye, but a pragmatic effort to maintain control over the Alliance's fragile southern flank.⁶⁶ When the 1975 NSSM 227, CIA assessments, and NATO's DRC/WP/74/2 (1974) and DPC/D/76/2 (1976) documents are analyzed together, the divergences between U.S. bilateral priorities and NATO's collective security perspectives become clearly evident. The NSSM 227 and the CIA memorandum evaluate Türkiye through a narrower set of institutional priorities, whereas NATO documents operate on a different analytical framework. While Washington conceptualizes Türkiye primarily through the lens of military facility networks (as in the NSC) or capacity shortfalls (as emphasized by the CIA), the DPC/D/76/2 and Force Planning reports prepared in Brussels characterize Türkiye as the keystone of the alliance's southeastern flank.⁶⁷ At first glance, this approach may seem paradoxical or contradictory: The U.S. documents predominantly highlight concerns related to trust and capability deficits, while NATO's position reflects a more comprehensive and collective commitment to alliance responsibilities. In this context, the aforementioned divergence gained particular significance in light of the international political developments of 1975. Following the Cyprus crisis, Greece withdrew from NATO's military structure, leaving the southeastern flank vulnerable. Additionally, the increasing naval presence of the Warsaw Pact in the Mediterranean further heightened Türkiye's strategic importance. Consequently, NATO's institutional response framed Türkiye not as a source of problems but rather as an “indispensable partner” whose support was essential for the survival of the southern flank.⁶⁸ Therefore, NATO reports have assessed Türkiye within the framework of preserving the integrity of the alliance, moving beyond the debates on reliability and capacity found in the U.S. documents. This enables us to distinguish the priorities of the U.S. and NATO as follows:

- The U.S. Priority: The focus of U.S. documents centers on the erosion of political trust in Türkiye. NSSM 227 characterizes Türkiye as an “unreliable yet indispensable” ally and acknowledges the loss of the “special relationship” nature of bilateral ties.⁶⁹

63 James Key Lindsay, *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 72-75.

64 William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774-2000*, Frank Cass, London, 2000, 140-146, Theodore A. Coulombis, *The United States, Greece, and Turkey: The Troubled Triangle*, Praeger, New York: 1983, 78-82.

65 George Harris, “Turkey and the United States: The Arms Embargo, 1974-1978”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no.4, 1976, 417-420, Tozun Bahcheli, *Greek-Turkish Relations Since 1955*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1990, 122-130.

66 Foreign Relations of the U.S. (FRUS), 1969-1976, Vol. XXX, Greece; Cyprus; Turkey, Document 68, August 14, 1974, 223-228, William Mallinson, *Kissinger and Invasion of Cyprus*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2016, 59-61; Süha Bölükbaşı, *The Superpowers and the Third World: Turkish-American Relations and the Cyprus Issue*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1988, 112-115.

67 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, 1974, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

68 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, 1974, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

69 U.S. National Security Council, Box 125, Folder “Turkey (1)” of the Ron Nessen Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, 20.03.2024.

- NATO's Priority: NATO documents focus on Türkiye's military capability gaps and economic dependency. The reports emphasize that the modernization requirements exceed Türkiye's economic capacity and that deterrence would collapse without external assistance.⁷⁰

When examined together, the U.S. and NATO documents reveal that differing institutional priorities ultimately point to the same strategic conclusion. While Washington characterized Türkiye as a politically unreliable ally, Brussels emphasized Türkiye's capability deficits and dependence on external assistance. Nevertheless, both the U.S. and NATO, despite employing distinct terminology and conceptual frameworks, acknowledged that Türkiye's departure from the alliance was inconceivable. Consequently, in the post-embargo period, Türkiye was no longer regarded as a "special ally" by the West but rather as a "compelled partner" despite its challenges.

5.2. Base Facilities Issue

NSSM 227 systematically prioritized the U.S. military bases in Türkiye according to their strategic importance, characterizing Ankara primarily as a "network of facilities." Within this framework, İncirlik Air Base was designated as "of critical priority," while the installations in İzmir and Ankara were classified as "of secondary importance." Smaller radar and communication sites were noted as "capable of being closed if necessary".⁷¹ This assessment demonstrates that, beyond the political reliability debates in Washington's perspective on Türkiye, the fundamental determining factor was the bases and logistical lines. In other words, Türkiye's strategic value was measured by its critical geographical location that enabled the operational infrastructure of the alliance.

NATO documents adopt a distinct analytical framework by positioning Türkiye within the cohesive structure of the alliance's southern flank. The DPC/D/76/2 report specifically names Türkiye as a pivotal component in the southeastern defense posture vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. It also points out that Türkiye's military capacity deficiencies and economic limitations necessitate collective support from the alliance to effectively fulfill this function. Consequently, whereas the U.S. perspective predominantly evaluates Türkiye in terms of its bases and facilities, the institutional discourse within Brussels centers on Türkiye's integral role within the comprehensive deterrence architecture of NATO.⁷²

5.3. Impact of the Embargo: Efforts to Alleviate Bilateral Strains within the NATO Framework

While the embargo triggered a severe crisis of confidence in U.S.-Türkiye relations, NATO's collective documents addressed the situation in a more conciliatory tone. The U.S. employed the embargo as a tool to exert pressure on Türkiye, whereas NATO acknowledged that the embargo weakened the alliance's deterrence and emphasized the necessity of compensation mechanisms.⁷³

In this context, while the embargo reflected a severe crisis of confidence in U.S.-Türkiye relations, NATO's collective documents addressed the situation in a more conciliatory tone. Undoubtedly, the U.S. employed the embargo as an instrument of political pressure

70 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, 1974, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 20.03.2025.

71 Ibid.

72 NATO Defence Review Committee, DRC/WP/74/2: Defence Review Committee Working Paper on Turkey Brussels: NATO Archives, <https://archives.nato.int/1975-1980-force-proposals-turkey>, accessed 12.03.2025.

73 Ibid.

against Türkiye; however, NATO acknowledged the detrimental impact of the embargo on the alliance's deterrence capability and consequently advocated for compensatory support mechanisms. This divergence in approach was largely shaped by the withdrawal of Greece from NATO's military flank in 1975 and the increasing Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean. While the U.S. pursued political negotiation strategies with Türkiye, NATO prioritized burden-sharing and appeals for assistance to prevent Türkiye's estrangement from the alliance. Based on the reviewed documents, Türkiye's position within the Western alliance has been characterized as follows:

- From the U.S. perspective: Unreliable yet indispensable.
- From NATO's perspective: Dependent on external assistance yet critical.

Although these two definitions stem from distinct institutional frameworks, their convergence reveals Türkiye's repositioning within the framework of a "compelled partnership". Ultimately, starting in 1975, the understanding of a "compelled partnership" supplanted the "special relationship" that prevailed between 1947 and 1974. The U.S. policies aimed at managing the security crisis, together with NATO's collective support mechanisms, operated in tandem to prevent Türkiye's disengagement from the alliance, yet they simultaneously entrenched the persistence of the trust deficit.⁷⁴

The reports examined reveal that the embargo not only harmed Türkiye but also directly undermined U.S. interests. From Washington's perspective, the issue had transcended mere pressure on Ankara; the weakening of deterrence in NATO's southeastern flank and the possibility of Türkiye drawing closer to Moscow rendered the embargo unsustainable. Consequently, lifting the embargo was not a concession granted to Türkiye but rather a measure to safeguard U.S. national interests. Indeed, American documents from the period contained warnings that should the embargo persist, the question, "Who lost Türkiye?" would inevitably arise in the future.⁷⁵ This statement clearly demonstrates that Washington was, in fact, unwilling to risk losing Türkiye from the alliance.

Conclusion

The 1974 Cyprus Operation and the subsequent U.S. arms embargo caused a profound rupture in Turkish-American relations, a fracture that was also reflected in NATO's defense planning documents. The examined documents demonstrate how this period redefined Türkiye's position within the Western alliance.

The first of these documents, NSSM 227, characterizes Türkiye as an actor whose reliability has become questionable, while simultaneously emphasizing the indispensability of its bases and geographical position. The CIA's 1975 Interagency Memorandum documents the direct military consequences of the embargo: a shortage of modern equipment, imbalances in stock levels, and inflation eroding the defense budget. The report explicitly states that without external assistance, Türkiye's deterrence capability would rapidly deteriorate. NATO documents provide detailed records of deficiencies in the land, air, and naval forces. In particular, it is noted that more than half of the naval vessels were "obsolescent", the ground forces fell significantly below ACE standards, and economic constraints hindered the achievement of set objectives.

74 Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America's Forgotten Ally*, Council on Foreign Relations, New York: 1987, 112.

75 James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace*, University Press of Kentucky, 2020, 106-110.

Despite differing institutional priorities, the documents collectively portray a consistent picture. Internal U.S. institutional reports record Türkiye as a strategically indispensable yet reliability-challenged ally, while NATO reports emphasize military capacity deficiencies and dependence on external assistance. The CIA report bridges these two narratives by revealing both the short-term military impacts and the long-term strategic consequences of the embargo. Another implicit insight gleaned from these documents is how the embargo, initially used as a tool to exert pressure on Türkiye, quickly produced counterproductive effects. From Washington's perspective, the issue shifted from imposing costs on Ankara to avoiding the risk of losing Türkiye altogether. As confirmed by NATO reports, the weakening of the southeastern flank eroded deterrence against the Soviet Union, demonstrating that continued embargo enforcement would ultimately harm U.S. interests themselves. These concerns emerged in American documents of the period not merely as a possibility but as a historic warning delineating the limits of embargo policy.

In this context, the documents from the period 1974–1980 reveal a profound redefinition of Türkiye's position within the Western alliance. Reports from Washington's institutions characterized Ankara as a politically unreliable actor, while NATO documents portrayed Türkiye as an ally that needed external support due to its capacity deficiencies and economic constraints. Although originating from different institutional priorities, these assessments ultimately converge on the same conclusion: despite its challenges, Türkiye remains indispensable. This finding elevates the period beyond a mere diplomatic crisis or issue, marking it as a critical juncture in the Cold War during which Türkiye's role within the alliance was fundamentally reassessed through official documentation.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

AI Usage Statement

No artificial intelligence applications were used in this study.

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