İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY PRESS

Türkiyat Mecmuası
Journal of Turkology,
IUTURKIYAT 2025, 35 (Special Issue): 85–101

https://doi.org/10.26650/iuturkiyat.1744121

Submitted | Başvuru 16.07.2025
Revision Requested | Revizyon Talebi 24.10.2025
Last Revision Received | Son Revizyon 31.10.2025
Accepted | Kabul 19.11.2025

Türkiyat Mecmuası
Journal of Turkology

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

Open Access | Açık Erişim

The Significance of the 1964 Johnson Letter for Turkish Cypriots and Its Impact on Türkiye-U.S. Relations

1964 Johnson Mektubu'nun Kıbrıs Türkleri Açısından Önemi ve Türkiye-ABD İlişkilerine Etkisi

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Abstract

This article contends that the 1964 Johnson Letter was not merely a diplomatic pressure tool against Türkiye, but a pivotal historical juncture that fostered enduring strategic realizations. Following the letter's receipt, it became unequivocally clear that Cyprus held an indispensable position within Türkiye's national security framework. Furthermore, the preservation of the Turkish presence on the Island was understood to be directly linked to the future of the Turkish presence in Anatolia. These developments consequently led Türkiye to re-evaluate Cyprus, no longer perceiving it solely as a foreign policy concern, but rather as an integral component of its national security. Concurrently, the imperative to formulate independent defense strategies, aimed at mitigating external reliance and prioritizing national interests, became strikingly evident. The study analyses the decade-long preparatory period (1964-1974), highlighting how the loss of confidence in allied support accelerated efforts to develop independent military capabilities and policy frameworks. The final outcome of this process was the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation, which radically transformed the security architecture of the Eastern Mediterranean and ensured the security of the Turkish Cypriot community. In these respects, the Johnson Letter stands as a critical watershed, that shaped the long-term trajectory of Turkish foreign and security policy.

Öz

Bu makale, 1964 Johnson Mektubu'nun Türkiye için sadece diplomatik bir baskı aracı olmadığını, aynı zamanda kalıcı stratejik farkındalıkları teşvik eden önemli bir tarihsel dönüm noktası olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Mektubun alınmasını takiben, Kıbrıs'ın Türkiye'nin ulusal güvenlik çerçevesi içinde vazgeçilmez bir konuma sahip olduğu açık bir şekilde ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca, adadaki Türk varlığının korunmasının, yalnızca Kıbrıs adasında yaşayan Türk toplumunun güvenliğiyle değil, aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin bölgesel stratejik hedefleri ve ulusal bütünlüğü ile doğrudan bağlantılı olduğu açıkça anlaşılmıştır. Bu gelişmeler, Türkiye'nin Kıbrıs'ı artık sadece bir dış politika meselesi olarak değil, ulusal güvenliğinin ayrılmaz bir bileşeni olarak algılayarak yeniden değerlendirmesine yol açmıştır. Eş zamanlı olarak, dışa bağımlılığı azaltmayı ve ulusal çıkarlara öncelik vermeyi amaçlayan bağımsız savunma stratejileri oluşturma zorunluluğu çarpıcı bir şekilde belirginleşmiştir. Çalışma, müttefik desteğine olan güvenin sarsılmasının, bağımsız askeri kabiliyetler ve politika çerçeveleri geliştirme çabalarını nasıl hızlandırdığını vurgulayarak on yıl süren hazırlık dönemini (1964–1974) analiz etmektedir. Nihayetinde, bu çabaların sonucu olarak, Doğu Akdeniz'in güvenlik mimarisini kökten dönüştüren ve Kıbrıs Türk toplumunun güvenliğini sağlayan 1974 Kıbrıs Barış Harekâtı gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, bu önemli gelişmeler bağlamında, Johnson Mektubu, Türk dış ve güvenlik politikasının uzun vadeli yörüngesini şekillendiren kritik bir dönüm noktası olmuştur.

Citation | Atıf: Çetinkaya, Şeref, Ali Burak Darıcılı. "The significance of the 1964 Johnson Letter for Turkish Cypriots and its impact on Türkiye-U.S. relations". *Türkiyat Mecmuası–Journal of Turkology*, 35, Special Issue (2025): 85-101. https://doi.org/10.26650/iuturkiyat.1744121

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Keywords Johnson Letter · Cyprus Crisis · Turkish Foreign Policy · NATO · Türkiye-U.S. Relations

Anahtar Kelimeler Johnson Mektubu · Kıbrıs Krizi · Türk Dış Politikası · NATO · Türkiye-ABD İlişkileri

Introduction

The island of Cyprus has historically occupied a strategic position within the geopolitical dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean. Situated merely 65 kilometers from the Anatolian Peninsula, the Island has, throughout history, captivated the interest of major powers due to its command over maritime trade routes and its proximity to Middle Eastern and Suez itineraries. It was consequently conquered by the Ottoman Empire for both military and economic considerations.[1] During approximately three centuries of Ottoman rule, a permanent Turkish population was established in Cyprus, fostering cultural ties and demographic belonging.[2]

The transfer of Cyprus' administration to Britain in 1878 and its de facto annexation in 1914 transformed the Island's status into a profound issue for Ottoman-Turkish public opinion. Although this status was legally recognized under the Treaty of Lausanne, the strengthening of the Enosis idea in the mid-20th century and the Greek Cypriot side's attempts to weaken the partnership structure of the independent Republic of Cyprus brought the Island back to Ankara's agenda.[3] For Türkiye, Cyprus is not merely about protecting the rights of the ethnic Turkish population on the Island; it is also a vital matter for the security of Anatolia's southern flank. This situation can be summarized as follows: "Cyprus has never been solely an ethnic issue in Türkiye's security perception, but rather an element of its defensive depth in the Mediterranean."[4]

The period of British colonial administration in Cyprus between 1923 and 1960 profoundly shaped not only the island's administrative structure but also the political consciousness, forms of organization, and mechanisms of social solidarity within the Turkish Cypriot community. This period constitutes a critical historical threshold for understanding both the fragile nature of the 1960–1963 Partnership Republic and the security-oriented transformation of Turkish foreign policy following the *Johnson Letter* of 1964. Under the pretext of maintaining "inter-communal balance," the British authorities pursued a divide-and-rule strategy, which led the Turkish Cypriots to take various initiatives to preserve their identity and develop mechanisms of representation. The political exclusion of the Turkish community after the 1931 uprising brought civic organizations to the forefront as a form of defensive reaction; the emergence of cultural societies in the 1940s and nationalist associations and federations in the 1950s further accelerated the institutionalization of Turkish Cypriot political life. Articles published from the 1940s onward in newspapers such as *Halkın Sesi*, *Bozkurt*, and *İstiklâl* documented public responses to British colonial policies, calls for resistance against the *Enosis* movement, and expressions of solidarity with Türkiye, reflecting the intellectual climate of the period. A content analysis of these press sources is particularly significant for understanding how the notions of "guarantorship" and "self-defense" gradually emerged within the Turkish Cypriot community by the late 1950s.[5]

[1] Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı'da Devlet, Hukuk ve Adalet (State, Law and Justice in the Ottoman Empire)*, (İstanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 2000), 14.

[2] Altay Nevzat, *Nationalism Amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave*, Acta Universitatis Ouluensis – Humaniora, Volume 61, (Finland: Oulu University Press, 2005), 276.

[3] William Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 31–35.

[4] William M. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000*, (London & Portland OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 194–195.

[5] Mehmet Balyemez, *İngiliz Yönetimi Döneminde Kıbrıs Türklerinin Siyasi Örgütlenmeleri (1923–1960).* 2nd edt. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2024).

Although the Republic of Cyprus, established by the 1959–1960 London and Zurich agreements, was defined as a neutral state under the guarantorship of Türkiye, Greece, and the United Kingdom, political crises that emerged shortly thereafter disrupted the partnership arrangement, and systematic attacks against the Turkish Cypriot community began.[6] The "Bloody Christmas" attacks in December 1963 led Ankara to seriously consider the option of intervention.[7]

During this period, the Turkish government stated that it could exercise its guarantor authority under international law and sought coordination with its NATO allies. However, the U.S. administration's approach to the Cyprus issue fell short of providing the support Türkiye expected; instead, pressures to deter intervention increased, citing that it would destabilize regional balance.[8]

The developments following the implementation of the *Akritas Plan* and the *Bloody Christmas* attacks of December 1963 marked a turning point in the Cyprus dispute. On 21 December 1963, armed Greek Cypriot groups launched coordinated assaults against the Turkish Cypriot community as part of the *Akritas Plan*, effectively ending the bi-communal structure established by the 1960 Constitution (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). These attacks resulted in severe casualties and mass displacement, forcing Turkish Cypriots to withdraw from all constitutional bodies and public institutions. President Makarios subsequently consolidated control over the state, reducing Turkish participation to a symbolic level and dissolving the two-community balance within the government.[9]

In response to the ensuing violence, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 186 on 6 March 1964, which established the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). However, by recognizing the Greek Cypriot administration as the sole government of Cyprus, the resolution effectively excluded Turkish Cypriots from international representation.[10] This move led Türkiye to protest diplomatically while simultaneously preparing for potential military intervention under its guarantor rights. The situation further escalated after U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's letter to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü on 5 June 1964, which warned that a Turkish intervention would not be supported by NATO and could provoke Soviet retaliation.[11] Collectively, these developments transformed the Cyprus issue from a local intercommunal conflict into a regional and international crisis that reshaped Türkiye's security perception.

The letter sent by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü on June 5, 1964, created an unprecedented shock effect in Turkish foreign policy, generating profound distrust regarding NATO solidarity. The letter explicitly threatened that the use of NATO weapons would be prohibited, and that the U.S. would not assume guarantor responsibility in the event of a possible Soviet attack.[12] The then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Feridun Cemal Erkin, described the letter's impact in Ankara with the following words:

"This text consisted of the harshest expressions that could be sent to an ally and aimed to suppress Türkiye's will for independent decision-making."[13]

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[6] Nevzat, *Nationalism Amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave*, Acta Universitatis Ouluensis – Humaniora, 282.

[7] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030.01.64.394.29, records of the NSC, Turkish Grand National Assembly, and Senate of the Republic concerning December 21, 1963 (Bloody Christmas); it is emphasized that Ankara reconsidered Türkiye's intervention options after the attack. Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030.01.64.394.29, National Security Council, Turkish Grand National Assembly, and Senate of the Republic records related to December 21, 1963 (Bloody Christmas); it is emphasized that Ankara reconsidered Türkiye's intervention options following the attack.

[8] U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* (Washington D.C., 1964), 45.

[9] James Ker-Lindsay, *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47-49.

[10] United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 186 (1964).* (New York: United Nations, 1964, March 6).

[11] Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy* 1774–2000, 173–174.

[12] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Letter to İsmet İnönü", 5 Haziran 1964, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964, Volume XVI: Cyprus; Greece; Turkey*, U.S. Department of State, (Washington D.C., 1964), 108.

[13] Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl: Anılar, Görüşler, Düşünceler*, (Ankara: Başnur Matbaası, 1975), 214.

The outcome of the letter was not merely the postponement of intervention in the summer of 1964; it triggered a fundamental shift in Türkiye's national defense strategy. The decade-long preparation period between 1964 and 1974 led to the independent development of military capabilities for intervention on the Island, the maturation of amphibious landing plans, and a questioning of full reliance on NATO.[14]

In conclusion, this article examines how the Johnson Letter created a rupture in the context of its diplomatic language, its meaning in terms of international law, its effects on Türkiye's crisis management process, and the strategic preparation period leading to the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation. The fundamental premise of this study is that the letter, which at first glance appeared to be an instance of negative diplomatic pressure, ultimately facilitated the independence of Turkish foreign policy and the preservation of the Turkish presence in Cyprus in the long run.

1. The Process Leading to the Johnson Letter (1963–1964)

Johnson, who became president after Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, was born in 1908 in Johnson City, near Texas, the first child in a family of five children. After completing his teacher training, Johnson was elected to the House of Representatives from Texas in 1934, like his father Sam Ealy Johnson. In 1935, he became the Texas official for the National Youth Administration, which provided opportunities for young people to find jobs or volunteer during the Great Depression as part of then-President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal". Despite his failure in the 1941 Senate election, Johnson was elected to the House of Representatives five times, becoming the first Congressman to volunteer for military service, and served in the South Pacific as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy. He remained in the Pacific until the summer of 1942, when Congress members were called back to Washington, and was awarded the "Silver Star" medal for his services.[15]

After becoming President, Johnson's "Great Society" slogan, put forth in line with the social welfare paradigm, aimed to create a prosperous society where everyone possessed equal political and social rights, was free from poverty, and had access to adequate healthcare conditions. In this regard, the Economic Opportunity Act he signed in 1964, along with the "War on Poverty" program, offered equal opportunities in education and employment. Through institutions such as "Head Start" and "Job Corps," job placement programs for young people were implemented, job training was provided to the unemployed, and they were assisted in finding employment. Beyond constructive measures like raising the minimum wage, providing food assistance to those in need, and offering government aid to impoverished students, Johnson established an insurance system called "Medicare," which provided free healthcare services to citizens over 65, the disabled, and those in need.[16]

Following the May 27, 1960 military intervention, the issue of democratization in Türkiye led to the rise of leftist elements within the military establishment, as seen in the "Affair of the 14," and to the purge of pro-American officers who had carried out the intervention. Subsequently, difficulties in suppressing Talat Aydemir's two coup attempts, which appeared to be under Soviet influence, and Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's ineffectiveness due to the veiled pressure of the military coup, negatively impacted Turkish-American relations.[17] Nevertheless, a CIA report published on February 13, 1963, stated that the İnönü-led minority government, which was predicted to remain in power for another year or even until the 1965 elections,

[14] Şükrü Elekdağ, "2 Mart Süreci: Türkiye'nin Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikası Açısından Bir Değerlendirme", *Avrasya Dosyası*, 2004, 10/1 (2004), 74.

[15] Robert A. Caro, *The Path to Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 1, (New York: Vintage, 1990), 531.

[16] Joshua Zeitz, *Building the Great Society: Inside Lyndon Johnson's White House*, (New york: Penguin Books, 2018), 146-147.

[17] Ataç and Çam, "Soğuk Savaş: Amerikan Büyük Stratejisi, Johnson Doktrini ve Kıbrıs", 614.

considered the Soviet Union the primary adversary in its foreign policy. The same report contained an assessment that the only possible protection against the Soviet Bloc was still accepted to be the United States and NATO.[18]

With Johnson becoming President in November 1963, a new issue emerged that could be characterized as problematic in Türkiye-U.S. relations: the Cyprus Issue. In November 1963, with the constitutional amendment made by Cypriot President Makarios to change Cyprus's bi-communal structure, systematic acts of destruction began in line with the Akritas Plan, which aimed to annihilate Turkish Cypriots and unite the Island with Greece.[19] In other words, the political instability in Cyprus starting in the early 1960s and the Greek Cypriot side's explicit declaration of the Enosis goal led to acts of violence directly targeting the Turkish community on the Island. The events of December 1963, known as "Bloody Christmas," resulted in the burning of Turkish Cypriot villages, the killing of civilians, and the de facto suspension of the constitutional order. These events also caused the deaths of nearly a thousand Turks and the displacement of approximately 30,000 Turks northward.[20] The assessment that Türkiye could exercise its right to intervene as a guarantor state was officially recorded in reports by both the National Security Council and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the early months of 1964.[21]

The December 1967 crisis represents a crucial turning point as it marked the first time Türkiye exercised its guarantor rights in Cyprus through a direct military action. Following the escalation of Greek Cypriot attacks on Turkish Cypriot villages—particularly the massacres in Geçitkale and Boğaziçi-Türkiye issued a decisive military response on 25 December 1967. On the same day, at 14:00, two Turkish Air Force jets conducted low-altitude flights over Nicosia, demonstrating Türkiye's resolve to uphold the constitutional order, territorial integrity, and independence of the Republic of Cyprus under the Treaty of Guarantee. This warning maneuver forced President Makarios and his administration to agree to an immediate ceasefire. The Turkish Armed Forces' limited yet strategic intervention served as a deterrent, safeguarding the Turkish Cypriot population and preventing a broader conflict on the island. Both the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot press portrayed the operation as a manifestation of "national determination," while Greek Cypriot and international outlets interpreted it as a clear "message of resolve" from Ankara.[22]

In a report titled "Cyprus: The Problem of Keeping the Peace," presented to Johnson by the CIA on January 28, 1964, the current situation, the stance of the parties, and, most importantly, what the United States should do, were explained in seven points. Firstly, it was stated that Turkish and Greek Cypriots were divided due to mutual distrust in light of the recent events, and they were concerned that only an external (military) intervention could halt the prevailing violence on the Island. According to the text, a breakdown of the current unstable ceasefire decision would lead to an active military intervention by Türkiye, as Greece would feel compelled to respond.[23]

According to the analysis in the text, the United Kingdom, bearing the primary burden of maintaining peace as a Guarantor State, was refraining from assuming an ambiguous role in the impasse between Turkish

[18] CIA, *The Prospects For Turkey*, 13 February 1963, accessed April 9, 2025 https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79R01012A023700010010-9.pdf, 2-3.

[19] Ataç and Çam, "Soğuk Savaş: Amerikan Büyük Stratejisi, Johnson Doktrini ve Kıbrıs", 616.

[20] Ahmet Sanver, *Akritas'a Karşı TMT*, (Lefkoşe: Yayınevi yok, Lefkoşe, 2012), 11.

[21] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, National Security Council Meeting Minutes and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Reports, March 12, 1964 – April 30, 1964, Fund No: 030-18-01-01, Ankara; official assessments regarding the Cyprus events include the phrase "intervention can be made as a guarantor state."

[22] Başkent University Cyprus Turkish History Research Center. (n.d.). *Turkish Cypriot Press*. Accessed October 24, 2025 https://kitamer.baskent.edu.tr/kw/index.php

[23] CIA, *Cyprus: The Problem of Keeping the Peace*, 28 January 1964, accessed April 14, 2025 https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79R00967A000900010012-9.pdf, 1.

and Greek Cypriots where no political solution seemed possible. This is because the British believed that the London and Zurich Treaties—the revitalization of which was deemed impossible given the need for a more comprehensive agreement—were insufficient to ensure peace. Furthermore, they acknowledged that, due to political conditions in both Britain and Cyprus, they could not maintain peace on the Island alone. The analysis also concludes that this assessment is correct. For as the unresolved situation persisted, the need for an external intervention beyond the Guarantor States to restore or maintain order on the Island became apparent. The fourth point addresses the other two Guarantor States, noting that despite the uncompromising and belligerent attitudes of both sides, they were equally disturbed by the escalating violence spreading across the Island, just like their compatriots there. In this regard, it is noteworthy that some Greek Cypriot leaders would prefer a peacekeeping force composed of NATO members instead of the United Nations, Britain, or Greece for a solution. This is because Türkiye, while prioritizing the continued presence or enlargement of its contingent on the Island, suspected that the United Nations would be unable to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in Cyprus, a sensitive region. Nevertheless, while neither side displayed a clear stance on the type of "Peacekeeping Force" to be deployed on the Island, almost all interested parties expressed no confidence in any peacekeeping initiative without the United States as a dominant element. The sixth point alluded to Türkiye's military intervention on the Island for the second time, referring to the December 1963 events. It was stated that after the loss of lives and property suffered by Turkish Cypriots, Ankara would not even entrust its "most reliable ally" with the responsibility of ensuring the safety of its compatriots on the Island; in other words, it was implied that the Turks had "lost their resolve" in light of recent events. The text further discussed the stance of Cypriot President Makarios regarding a possible peacekeeping force, noting that the Guarantor States would unanimously accept a Peacekeeping Force with the support of the United States. Additionally, it was mentioned that Makarios' approval would "preempt" pressure from the Soviet Bloc in the UN and provide a legal justification for many Asian and African countries to send troops. The final point, explaining why the United States should intervene in the matter, can be evaluated within the framework of the Cold War's "Grand Strategy" and the arguments mentioned above. Accordingly:

"Unless the U.S. participates openly and fully in a peacekeeping effort, the Cypriot communities, and to some extent the Greeks and Turks, will not act sincerely in seeking reasonable compromise. This is because each side will tend to advance its own interests by making personal appeals to the U.S. Moreover, when it comes to an agreement, it is inevitable that the U.S. will remain absolutely involved with this issue until a consensus is reached, though it must be acknowledged that finding an agreement will be difficult."[24]

In the "Intelligence Review" regularly presented to the President by the CIA, covering March 7-10, the analysis and commentary under the Cyprus heading, which was listed first, noted that the situation had become grave, that conflicts had spread throughout the Island, and that Greek "security forces" had declared war on Turkish Cypriots. It was also recorded that the UN representative and the UK did nothing to deter the Greek Cypriots, and this situation increased the likelihood of a Turkish military intervention. Furthermore, Turkish Foreign Minister Erkin appealed to the UK for urgent measures to stop the violence against Turks and once again asked the American Ambassador in Ankara, Hare, what stance America would take in the event of a possible Turkish intervention.[25]

The year 1964 marked an irreversible turning point in intercommunal relations in Cyprus. In February, violent attacks were carried out by Greek Cypriot forces against Turkish Cypriots in Limassol, followed by further assaults in the Gaziveren and Paphos regions in February and March. These incidents escalated

[24] CIA, *Cyprus: The Problem of Keeping the Peace,* 2-4.

[25] CIA, *The President's Intelligence Review*, 7-10 March 1964, accessed May 9, 2025 https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005996883.pdf, 2.

tensions on the island and generated widespread fear within the Turkish Cypriot community that the violence would expand. The attacks not only caused the deaths of hundreds of Turkish civilians and the destruction of several villages but also fundamentally altered the Turkish Cypriots' perception of security. The Turkish Cypriot press of the period described these events as an "organized and deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing," urging the community to stand united and calling for Türkiye's intervention to protect its kin.[26]

In the aftermath of these events, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 186 on 6 March 1964 in an attempt to control the situation by establishing the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). However, this decision created a profound problem of international legitimacy that reshaped the political structure of the island. By recognizing the government of Cyprus solely under President Makarios and, by extension, the Greek Cypriot administration, the resolution effectively nullified the Turkish Cypriots' status as co-founders of the Republic. From that point onward, both the international community and the United Nations regarded only the Greek Cypriot side as the legitimate government of Cyprus, systematically excluding the Turkish Cypriots from representation. This institutionalized imbalance laid the legal and diplomatic foundation for both the political rupture of the 1960s and the continuing complexity of the Cyprus issue today.[27]

The parliamentary decision mentioned in the report was a motion on March 16, 1964, "to authorize the dispatch of Turkish Armed Forces to Cyprus". 487 out of 491 deputies participating in the vote approved the motion, and Türkiye demonstrated its seriousness regarding military intervention to the U.S. and the Guarantor States by obtaining legal authorization. March 16 was also significant for the abrogation of the 1930 Turkish-Greek Treaty. As a result of the special privileges granted by this treaty, a decision was made to deport 12,500 Greek citizens of Rûm descent residing in Istanbul within six months, and this decision was immediately applied to a few Rûms involved in illegal activities.[28] With this decision, İnönü created the impression that he would take a firm stance on the Cyprus Issue in domestic politics, and in foreign policy, he intimidated Greece, which strongly supported Makarios, gaining an opportunity to exert diplomatic pressure on Athens in future negotiations.[29] A report published after the parliamentary decisions stated that although "the Turks believed that the threat of military intervention had brought about relative calm on the Island and intimidated the Greek Cypriots," the Turks were actually aware that the effect of these threats was short-lived. For "the Turks probably feel that they are the only alternative force to act when the UN Force fails to secure peace, and in our opinion, they will continue to be ready for intervention".[30]

According to U.S. Department of State records, an Ankara Embassy report dated February 3, 1964, made the following determination:

"The Turkish government views the situation in Cyprus not as a domestic security issue, but as a guarantor obligation based on international agreements".[31]

In the spring of 1964, the Turkish Armed Forces accelerated their operational preparations, and mobilization plans for landing crafts were drawn up. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs intensified diplomatic contacts

[26] Başkent University Cyprus Turkish History Research Center, *Turkish Cypriot Press*.

[27] United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 186*.

[28] CIA, *Weekly Summary*, 27 March 1964, 11.

[29] CIA, *The President's Intelligence Checklists*, 18 March 1964, 2.

[30] CIA, *The President's Intelligence Checklists*, 16 March 1964, 2.

[31] U.S. Department of State**,** *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964*, (Washington D.C., 1964), 45. This report indicates that Türkiye evaluated its right of guarantee within the framework of international agreements in the Ankara Embassy reports dated February 3, 1964.

with the United Nations and NATO, issuing various diplomatic notes and declarations explaining that the intervention was based on legitimate grounds under international law.[32]

However, the U.S. administration sought to deter any intervention, arguing that a Turkish military presence in Cyprus would upset regional balances.[33] To this end, the letter sent by President Johnson to Turkish Republic Prime Minister İsmet İnönü on June 5, 1964, is considered the first serious crisis in Turkish-American relations. Indeed, following the letter, Turkish-American relations began to be questioned in Turkish public opinion, leading to the intensification of "anti-American" rhetoric by leftist movements and even a segment of the armed forces in Türkiye. Furthermore, Türkiye's retreat on the Cyprus Issue caused a change in power in the 1965 elections, and the Justice Party, led by Süleyman Demirel, governed Türkiye alone until the March 12 Memorandum.[34] President Lyndon B. Johnson, in the letter he sent to Ankara, declared with the following statements that NATO alliance solidarity was conditional and that the U.S. might not assume responsibility in the face of a Soviet threat:[35]

"We cannot approve of the use of NATO weapons in any military intervention Türkiye might undertake in Cyprus. Furthermore, I cannot commit that NATO's assistance mechanism would be activated should the Soviet Union respond by attacking Türkiye."

This sentence represented an unparalleled threat in the diplomatic literature of the era. This is because while the collective defense obligation was considered fundamental under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, the Johnson Letter effectively challenged this principle.

As clearly seen in the letter, the United States was against Türkiye's unilateral intervention in Cyprus. Johnson initially stated that this was inconsistent with bilateral commitments and then, with harsh rhetoric, explained to his counterpart what would happen if Türkiye undertook a unilateral intervention. It was stated that, in the first instance, a Turkish-Greek conflict would be contrary to the NATO concept, and following such a conflict, in the event of a possible Soviet intervention, Türkiye would not be protected by its allies under Article 5 of NATO. Furthermore, it was mentioned that military equipment received from the United States would not be allowed to be used in a possible Turkish operation, and that Turkish Cypriots on the Island would be massacred during the operation, which would fail for these reasons. Finally, it was explicitly declared in the letter that all positive or negative decisions made by Türkiye had to be revoked because they lacked the approval of the United States.[36]

After the Johnson Letter reached Ankara, Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal Erkin made the following assessment in his memoirs:[37]

"This letter was not merely a warning, but a clear document of threat directed at Türkiye's independent will to make decisions."

On June 13, 1964, Prime Minister İnönü sent a message in response to the Johnson Letter. In his message, İnönü addressed the points raised in Johnson's message, generally stating that Türkiye was disappointed by the declaration that it would not receive aid from NATO in the event of a possible USSR attack, and that Türkiye had consulted with the U.S. before attempting intervention.[38]

[32] Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl: Anılar, Görüşler, Düşünceler*, (Ankara: Başnur Matbaası, 1975), 212.

[33] Süha Bölükbaşı, "The Johnson Letter Revisited", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29/3 (1993), 516.

[34] Ataç and Çam, "Soğuk Savaş: Amerikan Büyük Stratejisi, Johnson Doktrini ve Kıbrıs", 623.

[35] Lyndon Johnson, "Letter to İsmet İnönü", 108–109.

[36] For the full text of the letter, see "Johnson Letter," https://www.scribd.com/document/38718043/Johnson-Letter, accessed June 1, 2025.

[37] Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl: Anılar, Görüşler, Düşünceler,* 215.

[38] Haluk Şahin, *Johnson Mektubu*, (İstanbul: Gendaş Kültür Yayınları, 2002), 127-137.

İnönü did not write his letter in as harsh a tone as Johnson did. İnönü responded to each point Johnson conveyed in his message. On June 22-23, 1964, İnönü went to Washington and met with Johnson there.[39] The greatest diplomatic success of İnönü's visit to America was the U.S. acceptance that the London and Zurich agreements remained in force.[40] One of the factors that made the Johnson Letter significant was its redirection of Türkiye-U.S. relations.[41]

Although the Turkish government appeared to halt its intervention plans after the letter, diplomatic notes explicitly recorded that this decision was "only postponed for a while".[42] Thus, the 1964 Johnson Letter became a historical turning point that shook Türkiye's trust in both NATO and the U.S.

During the period in which the *Johnson Letter* was written, Archbishop Makarios and the Greek government engaged in close military cooperation that openly violated the constitutional and international framework established by the 1959 Zurich and London Agreements. In clear contravention of the *Treaty of Establishment* and the *Treaty of Alliance*, Greek military units and heavy weaponry were transferred to Cyprus, and the *Greek Cypriot National Guard* (*Ethniki Froura*) was formed without any constitutional legitimacy. This new military structure, composed largely of Greek officers, fundamentally disrupted the balance of power on the island and intensified the sense of insecurity within the Turkish Cypriot community. These actions not only breached the provisions of the Nicosia (Lefkoşa) Agreements but also revealed that Makarios and Athens sought to consolidate de facto control over the Republic of Cyprus through militarization rather than cooperation.[43]

Therefore, the events surrounding the *Johnson Letter* should not be viewed in isolation or reduced to a single dimension of intercommunal conflict. A comprehensive and balanced assessment—taking into account Greece's military involvement and Makarios's unilateral initiatives—enables a more objective understanding of both Türkiye's reactions as a guarantor power and the strategic ambitions of the Greek side during this period.[44]

2. Diplomatic Language and Effects of the Johnson Letter

The Johnson Letter is considered one of the harshest warning texts ever sent to a NATO ally in the history of modern diplomacy.[45] The letter's diplomatic language is exceptional in that it contains overt elements of pressure and threat, extending beyond conventional norms of courtesy.

The letter's inclusion of expressions that contravened diplomatic norms and overstepped boundaries of respect led Türkiye to view it as a major source of humiliation. The letter initiated a strong wave of anti-American sentiment, thereby creating a significant impact on Turkish domestic politics and becoming a reference point in Türkiye-U.S. relations.[46]

[39] https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvi/4758.htm accessed June 3, 2025.

[40] Haluk Şahin, *Gece Gelen Mektup: Türk - Amerikan İlişkilerinde Dönüm Noktası,* (İstanbul: Cep Kitapları, 1987), 87.

[41] Gözde Alptekin and Ömer Özer, "Johnson Mektubu Haberlerinin Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet ve Tercüman Gazetelerindeki Sunumu Üzerine Bir İnceleme", *Akdeniz Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 34 (2020), 289.

[42] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030-18-01-02, June 1964; it was explicitly stated in diplomatic correspondence and NSC/BAŞKOM records that Türkiye's decision to intervene was "only postponed for a while".

[43] Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000,* 186-187.

[44] Ker-Lindsay, *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know,* 68.

[45] Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000,* 195–196.

[46] Fiona B. Adamson, "Democratization and the Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy: Turkey in the 1974 Cyprus Crisis", *Political Science Quarterly*, 116/2 (2001), 286.

According to U.S. Department of State archives, Johnson's instruction note to his advisors included the following statements:

"The letter must be sent to Ankara in a language that makes Türkiye fully comprehend that it will be left alone and that it must grasp the consequences of intervention."[47]

The most critical part of the Johnson Letter was as follows:[48]

"Türkiye's use of NATO weapons in any military intervention in Cyprus will not be permitted. Furthermore, should the Soviet Union launch an attack against Türkiye, I cannot provide any assurance that NATO's assistance mechanism would be activated."

This sentence is considered extraordinary in the history of diplomacy for two reasons. Firstly, while NATO's collective defense commitment is regarded as the cornerstone of the alliance, Johnson effectively questioned this principle. Secondly, directing such an overt threat of sanctions against a NATO member state's sovereign right to make decisions was an unprecedented practice in the literature.[49]

The evaluations made during the National Security Council meeting, held after Prime Minister İnönü received the letter, were reflected in the Prime Ministry Republican Archive as follows:

"A consensus was reached that this correspondence, aiming to suppress Türkiye's will for independent decision-making, was incompatible with alliance law, and that Türkiye's determination to take necessary measures to ensure its own security under all circumstances would be maintained."[50]

Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal Erkin made the following comment in his memoirs regarding the diplomatic tone of the letter:

"Johnson's letter was too harsh to be compatible with the understanding of friendship, and from the perspective of allied law, it was a controversial text."[51]

In international legal literature, the Johnson Letter is classified as a diplomatic demarche, or an official warning note; however, its decisiveness and the threat of economic sanctions it contained effectively elevated it to the level of an ultimatum.[52] The letter also clearly stated an element of economic pressure:

"In the event of such an intervention, the United States' defense and development aid would be subject to reconsideration."[53]

Considering Türkiye's significant dependence on the U.S. in the post-Marshall Plan era, this statement had a major deterrent effect on Ankara.[54] İnönü's speech in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, moreover, holds historical importance:

"There is no place for such a threat in alliance law. Türkiye makes all kinds of decisions when its national security is at stake."[55]

[47] In his letter of June 5, 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson directly warned Türkiye that it might find itself isolated (within NATO) and that intervention could lead to Soviet intervention, explicitly stating that "NATO allies might not assume responsibility towards Türkiye in such a case". This content is found in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964*, Volume XVI: Cyprus; Greece; Turkey, page 83 and its explanatory notes.

[48] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Letter to İsmet İnönü", 109.

[49] Baskın Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, I, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 629.

[50] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030-18-01-02, National Security Council minutes dated June 6, 1964).

[51] Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl: Anılar, Görüşler, Düşünceler,* 215.

[52] Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History,* 190-191.

[53] Lyndon B. Johnson, "Letter to İsmet İnönü", 108–109.

[54] Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000,* 196.

[55] Turkish Grand National Assembly, *Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Minutes*, June 16, 1964 session, General Assembly.

Hikmet Bila describes the rupture created by the letter as follows: "The Johnson Letter deeply shook confidence in NATO in Turkish foreign policy and revealed the necessity of an independent security strategy."[56]

It is, moreover, plausible to assert that this letter played a significant role in fostering a deeper re-evaluation of Türkiye's national security approach. Indeed, İsmet İnönü, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Türkiye, explicitly stated in an interview with Time magazine in mid-April (approximately one and a half months before the Johnson Letter) that Türkiye's relations with the U.S.-led NATO were not already based on mutual trust. In his statement, in which he emphasized that the parties were not demonstrating equal effort to maintain the alliance relationship, İnönü summarized the extent of NATO skepticism in Türkiye with these words:

"While Türkiye is doing its utmost to preserve its alliance with the West, its allies are competing with adversaries to dismantle the Western alliance. If our allies do not change their attitudes, the Western alliance will collapse, a new world order will be established under new conditions, and Türkiye will find its place in this new world."[57]

For this reason, the Johnson Letter is regarded in diplomatic literature not merely as a letter, but as a turning point that altered the trajectory of Türkiye's international relations.

3. 1964–1974 Preparation Process and the 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation

The Johnson Letter, while seemingly causing the Turkish government to postpone its decision to intervene in the short term, actually initiated a fundamental shift in Türkiye's long-term security planning. Following 1964, evaluations conducted within the National Security Council explicitly acknowledged the reality that the support of NATO might not be unconditional.[58]

Two months after the *Johnson Letter*, in August 1964, Greek and Greek Cypriot military forces launched a large-scale offensive against Turkish Cypriot resistance fighters and civilians in the Erenköy (Kokkina) region. This assault became one of the most violent episodes in the history of intercommunal conflict in Cyprus. In response, Türkiye once again exercised its rights under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee and deployed a squadron of fighter aircraft to protect the Turkish Cypriot population. During the intervention, Squadron Leader Captain Cengiz Topel's aircraft was hit, forcing him to eject over enemy-controlled territory. He was captured by Greek and Greek Cypriot forces and tortured to death. The Erenköy events clearly demonstrated Türkiye's determination to exercise its guarantor rights despite the political constraints and diplomatic pressures implied by the *Johnson Letter*. This intervention showed that Ankara would not yield to external pressure in safeguarding the Turkish Cypriot community's security and became a symbolic turning point reflecting Türkiye's strategic resolve to act independently in its foreign policy.[59]

In a 1965 General Staff report, this new approach was summarized as follows:

"Allied support will not always be available. Intervention in Cyprus should be considered a task to be carried out with national capabilities."[60]

[56] Hikmet Bila, *CHP 1919–1999*, (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 1998), 219.

[57] Nasuh Uslu, *The Turkish-American Relationship between 1947 and 2003: The History of a Distinctive Alliance*, (New York: Nova Science Pub Inc, 2003), 185.

[58] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030-18-01-02, June 1964; it was acknowledged in the NSC that NATO support was not unconditional.

[59] Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). *The Cyprus Question: Historical Background*, accessed October 25, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris-meselesi.en.mfa

[60] General Staff ATASE Archive, Report No: 1965-AT.42, 42.

In line with this, preparations for an amphibious operation systematically advanced during the decade between 1964 and 1974. The Turkish Armed Forces strengthened their amphibious landing capabilities, acquiring new landing ships and transport aircraft. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued its diplomatic initiatives on international platforms, emphasizing Türkiye's guarantor responsibility.

During the new wave of crisis in Cyprus in 1967, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel used the following expression in the Turkish Grand National Assembly:

"Türkiye's security is directly linked to the security of the Turkish presence in Cyprus. We are obliged to be resolute in this matter."

In the early 1970s, the governments of the time revised their amphibious and airborne assault plans. According to the Prime Ministry Republican Archive, the Ministry of Defense established a special coordination mechanism under the title "Cyprus Crisis Management Plan".[61]

Foreign Minister Feridun Cemal Erkin describes this process in his memoirs as follows:

"The Johnson Letter taught us that NATO's solidarity remained only on paper. We began preparations for an independent intervention for Cyprus."[62]

In July 1974, following the Greece-backed Nikos Sampson coup and the de facto declaration of Enosis, Türkiye decided to intervene under its guarantor rights. The Cyprus Peace Operation, which began on July 20, was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, an amphibious landing was made along the coasts of Kyrenia, and in the second phase, the security of Turkish residential areas in the Nicosia region was ensured.

Foreign Minister Turan Güneş justified the legitimacy of the operation as follows:

"Greece's de facto coup abolished the guarantor agreements, directly giving rise to the right of intervention."[63]

Hikmet Bila defined the operation as follows:

"The 1974 intervention is a historical step that effectively prevented a genocide."[64]

Şükrü Elekdağ emphasized Cyprus's place in Anatolia's defense with the following statement:

"The defense of Cyprus is a prerequisite for the defense of Anatolia. This strategic reality materialized in the 1974 intervention."[65]

Following the operation, a U.S. arms embargo was imposed, and Türkiye faced diplomatic pressure from within NATO. However, these developments also accelerated the policy of defense industry independence.[66] The General Staff's 1975 evaluation report summarized this process as follows:

"The operation made possible the independent execution of national defense capabilities and guaranteed the physical presence of the Turkish population on the Island."[67]

The 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation emerged as a result of the decade-long preparation period, combined with the climate of distrust created by the Johnson Letter. It became a historical turning point that solidified Türkiye's strategic autonomy.

[61] Prime Ministry Republican Archive, Document No: 030-18-01-02, June 1964; it was acknowledged in the NSC evaluations that NATO support was not unconditional.

[62] Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl: Anılar, Görüşler, Düşünceler,* 215.

[63] Turan Güneş, speech, Turkish Grand National Assembly, date/document or published source: *(Title of work)*, 1982, 134.

[64] Bila, *CHP 1919–1999*, 219.

[65] Elekdağ, "2 Mart Süreci: Türkiye'nin Güvenlik ve Savunma Politikası Açısından Bir Değerlendirme", 74.

[66] Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1774–2000*, 196.

[67] General Staff ATASE Archive, *1975 Evaluation Report* (encrypted archive); the statement "The operation enabled the independent execution of national defense capability and guaranteed the physical presence of the Turkish population on the island" was included in the evaluation.

4. The Impact of the Johnson Letter on Türkiye's Preparation for Intervention in Cyprus and its Domestic Defense Industry: An Examination of the 1964–1974 Process

The letter sent by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson on June 5, 1964, was an attempt to limit Türkiye's will to intervene in Cyprus through diplomatic pressure. However, paradoxically, this letter led to the institutionalization in Ankara of the conviction that one day military intervention on the Island would be inevitable.

During the sessions held in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, many deputies and government officials of the period emphasized that guarantor rights constituted a legitimate basis in international law and that this right could not be curtailed.[68]

The content of the Johnson Letter contained expressions that deeply shook the very concept of NATO alliance. Specifically, the letter stated that NATO could not guarantee assistance to Türkiye against a Soviet threat.

Immediately after this crisis, the government at the time took the following steps:

- Logistical support to the Turkish Cypriot Community was increased.
- New operational plans were updated at the General Staff for the military balance on the Island.
- Naval and air force modernization programs were accelerated.

It is reflected in the parliamentary records that a strong conviction prevailed in closed sessions of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (1964–1965) that "one day it would be inevitable to go to the Island."[69]

In the 10-year period following the Johnson Letter, Türkiye systematically developed its military preparations for Cyprus:

- Amphibious operation capability development: Landing ships and landing battalions were established.
- Airborne unit training: Specially trained commando brigades were established.
- Logistical lines establishment: The ports of Mersin and Iskenderun were reorganized as the main bases for the operation directed towards Cyprus.

The revelation of the unreliability of U.S. military aid resulted in the identification of dependence on imports as a strategic vulnerability. In this context:

- During the 1965–1970 period, efforts to develop domestically produced armored vehicles were initiated within the Land Forces Command.[70]
- Between 1970 and 1973, investment plans were prepared for the modernization projects of MKEK (Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation).
- In 1967, a decision was made to expand the Kırıkkale Ammunition Factory.

According to the reports of the parliamentary Defense Commission of that period:[71]

[68] Turkish Grand National Assembly, *Turkish Grand National Assembly Secret Session Minutes*, June 15, 1964, 105th Session, presentation of the Johnson Letter and discussions regarding the right of guarantee.

[69] *Turkish Grand National Assembly Record*, 11th Term, Volume 7, 105th Session (Secret Session), June 15, 1964, Ankara: Turkish Grand National Assembly Printing House.

[70] Ministry of National Defense, *Kırıkkale Ammunition Factory Expansion Directive*, MSB/1967–3498, Ankara.

[71] Turkish Grand National Assembly, *TGNA Commission Reports*, National Defense Commission, Term: 13, Legislative Year: 2, Report No: 204, 1971, Ankara.

"The sustenance of the defense industry, supported by national resources against all threats of intervention and embargo, is a fundamental security issue."

The tangible results of this understanding became much more evident after 1974.

The operation launched on July 20, 1974, was the product of Türkiye's many years of preparation. The amphibious landing on the Island was the realization of the concept of intervention that had been institutionalized in 1964.

When the U.S. embargo was declared:

- Supply of spare parts and ammunition ceased.
- Maintenance and repair of existing equipment were disrupted.
- The need for investment in the defense industry became a permanent imperative.

During this period, decrees published in the Official Gazette by the government formed the legal basis for institutions such as the Military Electronics Industry (ASELSAN) and Turkish Aerospace Industries Inc. (TUSAŞ).[72]

The embargo process led to the following institutional steps:

- ASELSAN (1975): Established to nationalize electronic warfare and communication systems.
- TUSAŞ (1984): Restructured to acquire aircraft assembly and maintenance capabilities.
- Defense Industry Support Fund (1985): An institutional framework was created for resource transfer.[73]
- ROKETSAN (1988): Established to nationalize rocket and missile production.[74]

The annual activity reports of the Ministry of Defense from that period indicate that these investments originated from the pursuit of strategic independence, which was forged by the 1964 crisis.[75]

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the 1964 Johnson Letter was not merely a diplomatic crisis, but the genesis of a lasting paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy and defense doctrine. This letter, sent to Türkiye by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, argued that a possible intervention in Cyprus could lead to a conflict with the Soviet Union; and in such a scenario, NATO's commitment to defend Türkiye might not be valid. This diplomatic tone was perceived as a harsh warning directed against the security interests of an allied state and severely eroded Ankara's trust in international alliances.

The letter's negative diplomatic content paradoxically triggered a profound strategic transformation within the Turkish state's mindset. The preservation of the Turkish presence in Cyprus, during this process, was viewed not merely as an ethnic or humanitarian responsibility, but also as an integral component of Anatolia's southern defense. Ankara concluded that the weakening of the Turkish presence on the Island would threaten the security not only of Turkish Cypriots but also of Anatolia itself; this conviction became

[72] Republic of Türkiye Official Gazette, "Decision on the Establishment of the Military Electronic Industry (ASELSAN)," Decision Number: 7/10222, November 14, 1975, Issue: 15373, Ankara and Republic of Türkiye Official Gazette, "Decision on the Establishment of the Turkish Aircraft Industry Joint Stock Company (TUSAŞ)," Decision Number: 7/10223, November 28, 1975, Issue: 15385, Ankara.

[73] Republic of Türkiye Official Gazette, "Law on the Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of the Defense Industry Development and Support Administration," Law No: 3238, Date of Acceptance: May 8, 1985, Date of Publication: May 9, 1985, Issue: 18785, Ankara.

[74] ROKETSAN Rocket Industry and Trade Inc. Establishment Decision," Turkish Trade Registry Gazette, Establishment Registration No: 161604, June 14, 1988, Issue: 2103, Ankara.

[75] Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Defense, 1985 Annual Report, Ankara: Ministry of National Defense Strategy and Coordination Department Publications, 1986.

institutionalized in military, diplomatic, and economic decision-making mechanisms. Thus, Cyprus evolved from being merely a foreign policy issue for Türkiye into a "national security barrier".

The decade-long preparatory period between 1964 and 1974 transformed not only military planning but also the national security strategy and defense infrastructure. Within the General Staff, operational plans, updated under the codename "Ayşe Tatilde" (Ayşe on Holiday), were prepared. Landing ships and commando units were established, and port cities like Mersin and Iskenderun were reorganized as logistical bases. Concurrently, national production armored vehicle projects were initiated within units subordinate to the Land Forces Command. MKEK modernization investments were planned, and the Kırıkkale Ammunition Factory was expanded. This process was not merely a tactical preparation but was also supported by structural decisions aimed at reducing Türkiye's external dependence during wartime. Reports from the 1971 Turkish Grand National Assembly National Defense Commission clearly revealed that during this period, the sustenance of the defense industry through national resources became a "national security issue".

The 1974 Cyprus Peace Operation was implemented as a practical outcome of these protracted preparations; it demonstrated Türkiye's capacity to act independently in the Eastern Mediterranean and safeguard its own security despite internal NATO tensions. The subsequent U.S. arms embargo further highlighted Türkiye's external dependence on the defense industry, leading to the conclusion that this dependency constituted a strategic vulnerability. As a result of this determination, institutions such as ASELSAN (1975), TUSAŞ (1984), the Defense Industry Fund (1985), and ROKETSAN (1988) emerged as institutional responses; the coercive diplomacy inherent in the Johnson Letter indirectly initiated a process that institutionalized Türkiye's defense capabilities. As stated in the activity reports of the then Ministry of National Defense, the origin of these investments lies in the "questioning of allied dependency" and the "quest for strategic independence" created by the 1964 crisis.

In conclusion, while the Johnson Letter appeared to diplomatically corner Türkiye in terms of its content, in the long term, it led to a structural rupture that both fostered autonomy in foreign policy and accelerated the emergence of a national defense industry. In this respect, the letter is regarded as a turning point in Turkish foreign policy history, and is accepted as the beginning of the institutional construction of an awareness that Türkiye can protect its national interests with its own capabilities. The coding of Cyprus not only as an ethnic and political entity but also as a strategic and geographical security shield became permanently embedded in the state's memory after this letter; the preservation of the Turkish presence on the Island became an indispensable element for the survival of Anatolia.

This historical rupture was not confined to the 1970s; it also laid the groundwork for Türkiye to pursue a more independent foreign policy within the multipolar international system that began to take shape from the 1990s onward. The preservation of the Turkish presence in Cyprus remained one of Türkiye's unwavering strategic priorities in the post-Cold War era; this priority gained even greater importance with the increase in geopolitical competition in the Eastern Mediterranean. The historical lesson learned from the Johnson Letter demonstrated that Türkiye could not solely rely on the NATO umbrella, but had to depend on its own deterrence and defense capabilities during times of crisis.

The steps taken in the defense industry have been among the most enduring institutional outcomes of this strategic mindset which developed after the Johnson Letter. The domestic and national production initiatives, starting with the establishment of institutions like ASELSAN, TUSAŞ, and ROKETSAN, further developed in subsequent years. This created an ecosystem that enabled Türkiye to produce its own UAVs, UCAVs (Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles), and high-tech ammunition in the 2000s. The current level reached by the Turkish defense industry is not only a technological achievement but also the product of

a historical accumulation. Undoubtedly, the starting point of this accumulation is the 1964 Johnson Letter and the process of mental transformation it triggered.

Peer Review Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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