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## US PRESIDENT L.B. JOHNSON'S LETTER OF 1964 AND ITS IMPACT ON TURKISH PUBLIC OPINION

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### Abstract

In its 50<sup>th</sup> year of a major break in the history of Turkish-American relations, US President L.B.Johnson's Letter of 1964 to Turkish Republic still exists as a reference for academic and political studies in the field. This article aims at analyzing Johnson's Letter of 1964 and its perception by the Turkish public opinion as reflected in newspapers of the period as well as the debate between the political parties and intellectuals regarding the confidentiality of state and autonomy in foreign affairs, issues that came to the forefront after the said letter surfaced. This letter does not only represent a change of perception in the bilateral relations but also a motivation for the Turkish public opinion to participate in the foreign policy issues of the country when it became public in 1966. It can also be stated that the letter and its impact created a ground for further flourishing anti-American sentiment in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Turkish-American Relations, Cyprus Issue, US Foreign Policy, Johnson Letter, Turkish Public Opinion,

The two victorious allies of World War II, US and the Soviet Union laid the basis of a bipolarized world depending on confronting ideologies in the post-war era. While Russia attempted to spread the ideology of communism all over the world, US as a capitalist and democratic country committed herself to blockading the "communism" in a broad 'containment' policy with all her might. Unfortunately this ideological confrontation created the Cold War Era which would shape the structure of the world in the next forty-five years. In the early phase of this period, the initiation of US aid to Turkey in 1947 under the Truman Doctrine, The Marshall Plan of 1948 and Turkey's admission to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 1952 made Turkey a significant part of US "containment" policy. Turkey's membership to NATO, which changed Turkish-American relations into alliance, also blockaded the possibility of Soviet invasion to the Middle East due to her strategic location in the region. On the other part, Turkey's emergence as a full and responsible member of the Western alliance represents one of the most significant political and strategic developments in her recent history.

Until the Cyprus conflict of 1964 bilateral relations between the US and Turkey can be considered to be an ascent despite some regional and global conflicts which concerned both countries, such as Eisenhower Doctrine (1957), U-2 Incident (1960) and Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). Such issues would become signals of an upcoming Turkish skepticism over American interest and politics concerning Turkey's security and autonomy in foreign affairs. For example, in 1958 Lebanon invited US military forces to cope with an internal crisis under the auspices of Eisenhower Doctrine and Turkey also became a part of this operation as US soldiers were transferred to Jordan from the American air base in İncirlik, Adana. The significance of this

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incident was about the claims that US, without informing Turkish authorities, used the base to proceed with the operation. This incident turned into a conflict as it was criticized by the opposition parties in Turkey. İsmet İnönü, the leader of C.H.P (People's Republican Party), expressed his criticism: "Isn't it the government's duty to inform the public in case the US planes and military forces use the military installation in Adana, in the Lebanon conflict? I only wanted to know, if the government invited these US forces or did they ask permission to use the base?" (Sander, 1979: 168-169).

Similarly, the U-2 Incident and the Cuban Missile Crisis resulted with such criticism questioning the American political implementations threatening Turkey's autonomy and security. Such issues created an atmosphere of skepticism about the nature of partnership and alliance between Turkey and America. However, in the Cyprus conflict, skepticism would reach its peak and would lead to a major deterioration in bilateral relations in and after 1964.

### **The Cyprus Crisis, America and Turkey's Threat of Intervention to the Island**

In 1960, the Cyprus Republic was founded with the principles of 1959 Cyprus agreement (London-Zurich Accords) which provided that the Turkish minority in Cyprus would have certain guaranteed political rights and representations as a protection against the Greek majority which populate 80 percent of the island (Uslu, 2003: 13). According to the Cyprus constitution, the legislature would have a separate representation for the Greek and Turkish communities, and also Cyprus would have an elected Greek-Cypriot president and a Turkish-Cypriot vice-president who could have the right to veto legislature on major issues. However, in 1963, President Archbishop Makarios proposed the elimination of the provisions involving communal separation. The Greek Cypriots, with the power of being in majority began to terrorize Turks in the island. The tension increased with the escalation of terrorism and reached its peak when "at Christmas 1963 the Greek Cypriot militia attacked Turkish Cypriot communities across the island, and very many men, women, and children were killed. 270 of their mosques, shrines and other places of worship were desecrated" (Stephen, 2004). Turkish government responded by sending fighter jets to fly over the island as a warning to Greek Cypriots and Turkish President Cemal Gürsel sent a letter to US President Johnson to pressurize the Greeks to end the massacre. In order to find a peaceful solution, Johnson replied that US would support all the decisions to be made by guarantor countries, but no further steps would be initiated by the US. Johnson also noted that he sent a message to Cyprus President Makarios and Vice-President Küçük stating he "will not presume to judge the root causes, or rights and wrongs as between Cypriots of the two communities. This is, in any case, inappropriate when innocent human lives are at stake"<sup>1</sup>. It was evident that US preferred to keep a neutral position and did not want to get involved in the issue, although the Greek Cypriots were the the group resorting to violence in the island. Finally, the guarantor countries met at London for a conference to discuss the latest issues but the meeting resulted with no specific resolutions. Turkey, in reference to the "Treaty of Guarantee"<sup>2</sup> declared to Greece, England and the US, that a military intervention by Turkish army would be implemented if Greek Cypriot's attacks against Turks would not be stopped.

Turkey's second threat of intervention came on March 13, 1964 with a diplomatic note sent to Makarios which stated that if the terror on Turks would not be stopped within 36 hours, Turkish troops would invade Cyprus.<sup>3</sup> Turkey was acting very confidently, hoping that the US would support Turkish arguments and initiate an active role as had happened before 1960.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson: "Messages to the President of Turkey and to the President and Vice President of Cyprus.," December 26, 1963. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26643> (Accessed Jan 2014)

<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of Guarantee which was signed at Nicosia on 16 August 1960 openly states the conditions in Article IV "In the event of a breach of the provisions of the present Treaty, Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom undertake to consult together with respect to the representations or measures necessary to ensure observance of those provisions. In so far as common or concerted action may not prove possible, each the three guaranteeing Powers reserves the right to take action with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the present Treaty." (Moran, 2010: 120)

<sup>3</sup> *Milliyet*, 14 March 1964

While Turkey was close for a solution under NATO's initiatives, Cyprus President Makarios managed to take the issue to be resolved with United Nations Assembly. After discussions under U.N General Secretary U Thant, a resolution was signed and the United Nations Security Council "decided in March 1964 that a UN peacekeeping should be sent to the island" (Sutterlin, 2003: 33). Despite the U.N initiative, Turkish Grand National Assembly, in reference to Treaty of Guarantee approved a law licensing the government to operate an intervention to the island on March 16, 1964.<sup>4</sup> Prime Minister İnönü warned the Greek Cypriots for the third time that Turkey would operate a landing to protect the Turks on the island and restore the stability. The press in Turkey also began to criticize the US policy which, in a way did not support the Turkish arguments. US briefly warned the two countries, Turkey and Greece, that if warfare broke up between them US would impose embargo on both of countries. US Senator J.W Fulbright visited both countries to slacken the tension but no specific results ensued.

The spring of 1964 witnessed the Greek Cypriots terror and massacre on the island and Turkey came to a conclusion that specific measures should be taken immediately. In a meeting where Turkish President, the cabinet members along with the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the issue. As a result, a statement was issued by the Foreign Minister F. C Erkin saying that "if the Greek Cypriots keep on attacking Turks, Turkey will invade the island within a short period of time. If they think that we will allow their violation of constitution, kidnapping the Turks and killing them, they are mistaken" (Gönlübol, 1982: 393). On June 4, 1964 Prime Minister İnönü, just before the Cabinet meeting on intervening in Cyprus, invited the US Ambassador Raymond Hare stating that Turkey would operate immediately. After three hours of conversation with İnönü, Hare asked for a delay of 24 hours to convey to the US these views and sent a telegram to State Department noting that Turkey is firm and committed to operate for a military landing to Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> On the next day the US Ambassador visited Turkish Foreign Minister and gave him the "Johnson Letter" which would create a crisis of unprecedented nature in Turkish-American relations.

#### **Content and Analysis of Johnson's Letter**

As has been said before, according to the US State Department archives the letter was written in 11 hours of time and the main objective was to prevent Turkey's military operation. From the American stance, it could be considered a pragmatic approach to include highly crucial arguments for their objective, but from Turkey's point of view the letter is more than a disappointment as the American tone and arguments might easily be received as a potential threat to the nature of the alliance and to Turkey's security. The letter firstly exposed skepticism about NATO partnership and the idea of collective security, because a Soviet reprisal against Turkey due to the intervention to the island may not be an issue of NATO from the American stance.

Furthermore a military intervention in Cyprus by Turkey could lead a direct involvement by the Soviet Union. I hope you will understand that your NATO allies have not had a chance to consider whether they have an obligation to protect Turkey against the Soviet Union if Turkey takes a step which results in Soviet intervention without the full consent and understanding of its NATO allies (Miller, 2000: 108).

From the Turkish stance, this was the most significant point in the letter which caused a dilemma and disappointment among Turkish statesman. The sentiment in Turkey was that Turkey became a member of NATO for both a collective security and containing the Soviet aggression against the Western world. Such reticence looked like a blow to this security.

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<sup>4</sup> Turkish Grand National Assembly, Minutes of Session NO.33, 16 March, 1964 (Accessed on Jan. 2014) <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/t03/c003/tbmm03003007.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> U.S Ambassador Hare sent the telegram at 1.a.m on June 5, 1964 and the response, the Johnson Letter came back at 12:15 a.m according to the State Department's archives. It can be told that Johnson's Letter was written in 11 hours and the main concern was to avoid Turkey's military operation in all respects. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvi/4757.htm> (Accessed on Jan. 2014)

Secondly, the letter stated that US would not permit the use of US supplied military equipments in a military operation to the island.

Under Article IV of the Agreement with Turkey of July 1947, your Government is required to obtain United States consent for the use of military assistance for purposes other than those for which such assistance was furnished. Your government has on several occasions acknowledged to the United States that you fully understand this condition. I must tell you in all candor that the United States cannot agree to the use of any United States supplied military equipment for a Turkish intervention in Cyprus under present circumstances (Miller, 2000: 109).

President Johnson, by making a reference to the treaty of 1947, not only created an argument to prevent Turkey's military operation but also exposed a crucial issue about the US assisted military equipment in Turkey. Article IV of 1947 treaty states that US originated equipments should not be used without the permission of US government<sup>6</sup>. This can be considered as one of the dramatic incidents in İnönü's political life, because he was the President of Turkey who signed the treaty in 1947 which Johnson referred to in his letter. Since Turkey was a recipient of US military equipments, it would be almost inevitable to operate a landing without them.

Thirdly, Johnson emphasized that an intervention by Turkey would not be acceptable to the US Government, even if Turkey was given a legitimate right to intervene, according to the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960.

It is my impression that you believe that such intervention by Turkey is permissible under the provisions of the Treaty of Guarantee of 1960. I must call your attention, however, to our understanding that the proposed intervention by Turkey would be for the purpose of supporting an attempt by Turkish Cypriot leaders to partition of the island, a solution which is specifically excluded by the Treaty of Guarantee (Miller, 2000: 108)..

In other words, the perception or interpretation of an international treaty from the American point of view did not coincide with Turkey's views on the said treaty. According to US, Turkey's right to intervene due to the Treaty of Guarantee would violate the treaty itself because it might lead to disintegration in the island. Undoubtedly, this argument of USA was to prevent Turkey's military action, but it also exposed the fact that international treaties, similar to NATO's collective security understanding, might be interpreted differently with regard to American interests.

Until the case of this Cyprus issue, Turkey was a loyal practitioner of containment policy, therefore it was not a discussion or debate in Turkish politics whether foreign affairs of the country is autonomous or not, due to the atmosphere of Cold War. However, the Cyprus problem was a vital issue for the foreign affairs of Turkey that directly concerns her interests. When the letter was wired to Ankara, the Turkish government had already made the decision to intervene in the island, but İnönü had to cancel the operation when he received the letter. As President Johnson invited İnönü to Washington for a full discussion and to seek cooperation for further issues relating to Cyprus, İnönü welcomed the invitation along with a response to the points stated in Johnson's letter. Johnson's letter was kept confidential until it would be released for public in January 1966 by *Hürriyet*, a daily newspaper in Turkey. However, in 1964 the content of the letter was not made public but the newspapers wrote about Johnson's personal request to cancel the operation and his invitation to Washington.<sup>7</sup>

### **Prime Minister İnönü's Response and Visit to Washington**

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<sup>6</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> article of 1947 Treaty states that " ...The Government of Turkey will not transfer without the consent of the Government of the United States, title to or possession of any such article or information nor permit, without such consent, the use of any such article or the use or disclosure of any such information by or to anyone not an officer, employee, or agent of Government of Turkey of for any purpose other than that for which the article or information is furnished (Bebans, 1974: 1164).

<sup>7</sup> *Milliyet* 06 June 1964

İnönü responded to Johnson after a week and used a less severe tone while presenting his disappointment about the letter he received. İnönü emphasized that the message brought forth a disillusionment in Turkey, because Turkey had always acted very carefully about the issues of bilateral relations. In addition, he noted that Turkey has “consulted US about the need for intervention to the island for four times since 1963” in response to Johnson’s urge for “responsibility for complete consultation with US” (Erim, 1975: 316). About the interpretation of the US about the Treaty of Guarantee, İnönü stated: “Mr. Johnson, the fourth article of Treaty of Guarantee clearly states that, if a violation of treaty happens, three countries should act to stop the violation. If it is impossible, then one of the guarantor countries can act alone. This is a legitimate right given in the treaty....Turkey will never forego this legitimate right” (Erim, 1975: 315).

In his letter, İnönü focused on the NATO alliance and the issue of collective security. As Johnson clearly stated that NATO members would not defend Turkey against a possible Soviet attack resulting from Turkish intervention to the island, İnönü responded “US and Turkey have different opinions about the main principles of NATO... If the constitution of NATO is so weak as to be swept away by the assertions of the aggressor, then it really is in need of medical care. If NATO would not defend one of its members by siding with the reasoning of the aggressive country, then NATO really needs to be restored” (Erim, 1975: 317). However, İnönü did not mention the bilateral agreement of 1947, which stated that US originated equipment could not be used without the permission of US government. As mentioned before, probably İnönü himself was the head of administration who had signed the treaty of 1947 and he knew well about the articles and conditions determined before.

As İnönü was invited to Washington for further discussions, he accepted to go although he was not very optimistic about American stance as the letter already stated US views. Before leaving the country, İnönü secretly presented and discussed the letter in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in order to win a vote of confidence for his government. The vote of confidence resulted with 200 white, 194 red, 2 green (abstaining) votes<sup>8</sup>. Although İnönü gained the vote of confidence, resulting vote numbers made it obvious that the Assembly was critical of government policies on this issue. On June 23, 1964 he met with Johnson at the White House along with the other officials and Johnson said they “do not have a magic formula to offer” but they are prepared to assist Greece and Turkey in finding a solution.<sup>9</sup> The meeting ended with no specific solution beyond a joined statement of good will: “The President and the Prime Minister expressed their conviction that their peoples are devoted to common democratic principles, to individual freedom, to human dignity and to peace in justice.”<sup>10</sup>

#### **The Letter Becomes Public in 1966.**

In early 1966, some parts of the Johnson letter were published in a daily newspaper *Hürriyet* on January 13, 1966 by a journalist Cüneyt Arcayürek. The front page of the newspaper was entitled as “Johnson’s Letter” with a large photograph of President Johnson. Although the letter was actually written and sent in 1964, it became the top issue in the agenda of both politicians and public opinion. Istanbul District Attorney applied to court to collect the newspapers that had already circulated, due to the violation of laws number 132 and 137 and so did the police. The editor in chief Ferhan Devekuşuoğlu was taken to testify by prosecution.<sup>11</sup> In the Senate, on January 13, 1966, Foreign Minister İhsan S. Çağlayangil announced: “Since a false version of the Johnson letter, which was sent to İnönü in 1964, is published in a daily

<sup>8</sup> Turkish Grand National Assembly, Minutes of Session 109, 19 June 1964 (Accessed on Jan. 2014)  
[http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM\\_/d01/c031/mm\\_\\_01031109.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM_/d01/c031/mm__01031109.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> US Department of State Archive, *Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume XVI, Cyprus; Greece; Turkey*, Memorandum of Conversation, (accessed on Jan. 2014)  
<http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvi/4758.htm>

<sup>10</sup> “Joint Statement Following Discussions With the Prime Minister of Turkey.,” June 23, 1964. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. (Accessed Jan. 2014)  
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26336>

<sup>11</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 14 Jan. 1966

newspaper today, it becomes an absolute necessity to make the original one public.”<sup>12</sup> A.P. (Justice Party) government permitted a full version of the letter, along with İnönü’s response, to be published on the following days. At the same time White House also released the original version of the letter and it was published in *Middle East Journal*.<sup>13</sup> The opponent parties criticized the government’s failure to keep the confidential papers of the National Assembly, as Johnson Letter was discussed in a secret session in 1964. Due to Çağlayangil’s statements about the government’s decision to release all the original letters, Grand National Assembly gathered on June 14, 1966 to discuss the issue in which the government was under suspicion.<sup>14</sup> In response, the government stated that investigation about the issue is in progress and it became inevitable to release the original letters at that time.

Ironically, on January 14, 1966 both Johnson’s Letter and İnönü’s response were published in *Cumhuriyet* and *Hürriyet* before a formal government decision was taken. But this time the government could not manage to collect the newspapers because the Appellate Court denied the appeal of government for the collection. Then the government, one step behind the media, declared that both letters in their original version would be given to the press. This situation was depicted as tragicomedy by Çetin Altan , a senator and member of T.İ.P (Turkish Labor Party), and also a prominent journalist. He pointed out “Can’t the government protect its archives? The government has become a post-office. Which letter is this? If the government cannot keep its secret papers then it has lost its power to govern. The government attitude demonstrated its incapacity.”<sup>15</sup>

Following the appearance of the letters in press, a harsh criticism by politicians, intellectuals and journalists dominated the agenda of public opinion regarding the consequences of the letter. Some of them focused on the present government’s inability of keeping confidential papers of state whereas others emphasized the former government’s inability to take autonomous decisions free from the interference of the US

#### **The Controversy between C.H.P and A.P and the Other Political Parties**

After the publication of the letter, the opponent parties firstly criticized the government’s policy rather than the content of the letter. The government was blamed for revealing the letter to the public through the press. C.H.P members condemned A.P administration for not being able to protect the confidentiality of the state. Moreover, they expressed that a state had some basic principles to maintain its continuity, which the present government had violated through its misconduct. As a reply to this accusation of C.H.P, Turkish Prime Minister Demirel stated that it was not a fault of A.P administration but the failure of the bureaucracy which had collapsed during İnönü’s administration. After this statement C.H.P members objected and shouted at the Prime Minister, then Demirel continued his announcement and said that bureaucracy was in need of an overhaul because it was not good to have an image of Turkey whose administration was under the influence of letters. Demirel sent an instruction to all ministers and state offices, ordering that the officials had to act carefully in accordance with the principles of their duties and warned them to regulate the relations with the press. The opponent parties claimed that the government was under the influence of American practices. Prime Minister, in response to the accusation, stated that the letter was not the concern of the present government and there was no impact of American influence over the government. He also stressed that: “If anything exists as the evidence of connection between the government and the accusations, we are ready to be judged in the Supreme Court.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Milliyet*, 14 Jan. 1966

<sup>13</sup> US Department of State Archive, *Foreign Relations*, (Accessed on Jan. 2014)  
<http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/johnsonlb/xvi/4757.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Turkish Grand National Assembly, Minutes of Session No:35, January 14, 1966 (Accessed on Jan. 2014)  
[http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM\\_/d02/c002/mm\\_02002035.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM_/d02/c002/mm_02002035.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> *Yeni Asır* 15 Jan. 1966.

<sup>16</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 15 Jan. 1966

Foreign Minister Çağlayangil, in order to alleviate the accusations on government's failure, declared in the senate that they shared the same ideas with the opponent parties about keeping the letters confidential, but he also emphasized that current developments forced them to release the original version of letters.<sup>17</sup> Çağlayangil continued his speech and pointed out that both letters were the concern of the previous government. Then, Ahmet Tahtakılıç, a member of C.K.M.P (Republican Villager People's Party) commented on the foreign minister's speech and said : "The concept of state is eternal. It is unacceptable to affiliate the letters to the former or current government. The letter was sent to the Republic of Turkey. If the letter becomes a polemic in the domestic affairs of the state, the situation will be harmful for Turkey."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Faruk Önder, speaker of M.P.(People's Party) defined the publication of state's confidential papers as "a dangerous game which should not partake in governance of country".<sup>19</sup>

The Johnson Letter caused ramifications as a domestic issue rather than a foreign policy problem among the statesmen in the short period after its appearance in the press. But in the long run, the Turkish statesmen would consider the Johnson Letter issue as a blow to the bilateral relations between US and Turkey. The journalists were divided on the issue: one group interpreted the style of the letter and focused on the influence of US in the Turkish foreign policy and the other group moderately considered the letter as a warning from an ally.

#### **The Debate between the Intellectuals and Journalists**

The immediate impact of the disclosure of the Johnson Letter was not so great. However it became increasingly significant over the following years as its implications were fully realized by the statesmen and intellectuals. Different from the politicians, intellectuals firstly scrutinized the US-Turkish alliance and then questioned the autonomy of Turkey. The feature-writers of the newspapers commented extensively on this issue. Most of the writers agreed on the diplomatic impoliteness and the severe tone of the Johnson letter. Truly, the letter was a far cry from the conventions of diplomatic communication. This interpretation was undeniably confessed in the letter with Johnson's words: "You may consider that what I have said is much too severe..." (Miller, 2000: 108). Haluk Şahin, a professor of communication had an interview with George Ball who was the Undersecretary of US Government in charge of Cyprus issue in 1964. Ball saw the letter just before it was wired to Ankara and labelled it a diplomatic atom bomb (Şahin, 2002: 30).

İlhan Selçuk, an intellectual and a columnist in *Cumhuriyet* was one of the journalists who severely criticized both the letter and the government policies. He used quite a harsh tone focusing on independence of the country as well as diagnosed the significance of the letter which would be an irritation and a reference for bilateral relations in the coming decades. He stressed the following words in his column: "Probably a servant's uniform may be suitable for those governors who converted Atatürk's Republic into a satellite of America. Johnson's Letter is a historical document which evidently indicates the tragic condition of Turkey in the world".<sup>20</sup> Selçuk also criticized the confidentiality principles of the state as anchored in his column the following day: "How did the American Ambassador learn the Turkish landing on Cyprus? Did our government consider it a duty to inform US or did the Ambassador obtain this information in his own way?"<sup>21</sup>

Different from the columnist in *Cumhuriyet*, some other journalists were more moderate. Behzad Bilgin, a columnist in *Yeni Asır*, considered the letter as an information with good intention from US to Turkey. He focused on the parts that justified American initiative such as Turkish government's 'responsibility for complete consultation with the US He pointed out that Turkey had to consult US before implementing such an operation as it was a sort of

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<sup>17</sup> *Yeni Asır* 15 Jan.1966

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Turkish Grand National Assembly, Minutes of Session NO.35, p.387, January 14, 1966 (Accessed on Jan. 2014) [http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM\\_/d02/c002/mm\\_02002035.pdf](http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/MM_/d02/c002/mm_02002035.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 14 Jan. 1966

<sup>21</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 15 Jan. 1966

commitment of the Turkish governments. In his column, Bilgin quoted from the Johnson letter emphasizing the alliance with US and Turkey's unilateral decision: "...your government to present a unilateral decision for such consequence to an ally who has demonstrated such staunch support over the years as has the United States for Turkey".<sup>22</sup> In fact, İnönü, in his response to US stated that the Turkish government had consulted not only America but also Greece and England prior to the planned operation. Bilgin criticized Turkey's so-called lack of commitment to consult US but he did not prefer to mention the US policy towards the Cyprus conflict. He, in a way, defended the Johnson Letter: "President Johnson pointed out that a Turkish intervention to the island would be a dangerous action and Turkey could have a war with Greece. Subsequently NATO, without analyzing the situation, would not defend Turkish territory".<sup>23</sup>

Abdi İpekçi, editor in chief of *Milliyet*, in his column "Durum" (Situation) on the front page of the newspaper defined the letter as a threat to Turkey and asked whether it is a "letter" or an "ultimatum".<sup>24</sup> However he defended the İnönü government that a military operation might be an adventure that could lead to war between Turkey and Greece. On the next day he focused on the İnönü's letter as a response to Johnson who had claimed that American initiative to prevent Turkey's operation would put all the responsibility on US government<sup>25</sup>. He also referred to the statements of Dean Acheson<sup>26</sup> which were published in *Milliyet* on the same days which were mostly in favor of Turkey's policies.

Ecvet Güresin a columnist in *Cumhuriyet* criticized the intelligentsia and journalists who were not reacting against Johnson but against the İnönü government of 1964. He compared the debate and the atmosphere of the country to the situation of the Ottoman Empire in World War I period when the intellectuals and journalists of that time were in favor of Germany or England but not their own nation. Güresin expressed that they have to support their nation and their government.<sup>27</sup> Another columnist and the owner of *Cumhuriyet*, Nadir Nadi supported Güresin and emphasized the legitimacy of Turkey's unilateral decision to intervene in Cyprus as it was Turkey's right designated by the Treaty of Guarantee. Nadi also quoted from Paul Findley, a member of US Congress and the Chief of NATO Commission, who blamed President Johnson that the letter he had written to Turkey broke the mechanism of NATO.

In other words (referring to the letter) US would not automatically defend the Turkish territory against a possible Soviet aggression but would examine the conditions to act. So, US before defending Turkey, would analyze the situation as if the Soviet aggression happened because of Turkey's provocation. But NATO mechanism should work automatically and for the first time (with the letter) this automatic mechanism created a base for discussion. If NATO would try to evaluate the full legacy of the attacked country than the foundation of the alliance would collapse.<sup>28</sup>

The Johnson Letter brought about a turning point in the Turkish-American relations which were quite harmonious until that time. When it became public, the Turkish public opinion began to question the government policies and US alliance. The reflection of the letter notoriously spread among the people and an anti-American sentiment emerged within the following year. One of the politicians and also academician, Prof. Nihat Erim who was İnönü's advisor on Cyprus issue during his administration, expressed his statement regarding the impact of the letter on Turkish public opinion: "It can be said that, Turkey was the only country in the world in which the people did not shout 'Go Home' at Americans. After the Johnson

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<sup>22</sup> *Yeni Asır*, 16 Jan. 1966

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *Milliyet* 15 Jan. 1966

<sup>25</sup> *Milliyet*, 16 Jan. 1966

<sup>26</sup> Dean Acheson was former State Secretary of U.S (1949-53) and advisor to Lyndon Johnson administration.

<https://history.state.gov/departments/history/people/acheson-dean-gooderham>

<sup>27</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 17 Jan. 1966

<sup>28</sup> *Cumhuriyet* 18 Jan 1966



Letter, the trust of the Turkish public opinion in US was shaken and an anti-American sentiment gained strength over the years" (Erim, 1975: 303). Similar slogans like "No to NATO" were echoed by the leftists in the latter part of 1960s (Harris, 1985: 189). Dankwart Rustow defined the letter as "threatening" and also stated that it had an excessive damaging impact on bilateral relations when it became public (Rustow, 1989: 135). On the other hand, Haluk Şahin in his book on *Johnson's Letter* claims that it was İnönü's intention to provoke Americans to prevent a Turkish military operation because in reality Turkey was not equipped for a successful landing to Cyprus (Şahin, 2002: 120). In addition, İnönü knew that he would receive such a severe message which would disclose the nature and intention of American policy against Turkey in Cyprus issue. However, if this claim is considered to be true, İnönü would knowingly take the risk of being accused of being passive against American pressure in Cyprus conflict and lead a debate and polemic in the foreign affairs of an unpredictable nature (Erhan, 2002: 691).

To conclude, the Cyprus crisis and Johnson's notorious letter opened a new page in the Turkish American relation. In the short term, Turkish people did not give immediate reaction against America but since the independence war they became closely involved in a foreign policy issue of an unprecedented nature. Significantly, people other than leftists began to question the relations with US and NATO alliance. The impact of the letter would also have repercussions during the visit of the Sixth Fleet, US Navy Forces to İstanbul in August 1968. The labor federations and the other left-wing groups protested the fleet which had received a heartfelt welcome in the late 1950's. Strikes, conferences, university youth, peace marches and articles in the press had impact on the main trends in foreign policies. Considering the past fifty years of time, the Johnson Letter has still been as first referenced incident when an American policy regarding Turkey is received with suspicion or anti-Americanism appeared on Turkey's agenda.

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