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ANOTHER CRISIS BETWEEN THE ALLIES

Bilkent University 2025

ANOTHER CRISIS BETWEEN THE ALLIES:
THE OPIUM CRISIS AND THE ARMS EMBARGO

A Master's Thesis

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Ankara
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To my late father



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By Ufuk Yılmaz Sevim

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

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ABSTRACT

ANOTHER CRISIS BETWEEN THE ALLIES: THE OPIUM CRISIS AND THE ARMS EMBARGO

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This thesis historically analyzes the opium issue and the arms embargo in 1975 between the Republic of Turkey and the United States of America through the theory of asymmetric relations. The central focus is American coercion over Turkey on the opium issue, and the arms embargo is not a result of American imperialism, but a consequence of asymmetry in the bilateral relations. This thesis is based on archival primary sources, such as diplomatic correspondence, secondary sources from the existing literature, and a theoretical framework. The main purpose of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the Turkish-American relations and to prevent conceptual ambiguity between imperialism and asymmetric relations. The main argument is that American coercion is not an act of imperialism but an act of the senior partner over the junior partner in an asymmetric relationship.

Keywords: Opium issue, Arms Embargo, Imperialism, Asymmetric Relations, the 1970s.

ÖZET

MÜTTEFİKLER ARASINDA BİR BAŞKA KRİZ: HAŞHAŞ KRİZİ VE SİLAH AMBARGOSU

Sevim, Ufuk Yılmaz
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Eylül 2025

Bu tez, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ile Amerika Birleşik Devletleri arasındaki haşhaş meselesini ve 1975'teki silah ambargosunu asimetrik ilişkiler teorisi üzerinden tarihsel olarak analiz etmektedir. Odak noktası, ABD'nin haşhaş meselesi üzerinde Türkiye'ye uyguladığı baskıdır ve silah ambargosunun Amerikan emperyalizminin bir sonucu değil, ikili ilişkilerdeki asimetrinin bir neticesi olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bu tez, birincil ve ikincil kaynakların derlemesine ve teorik bir çerçeveye dayanmaktadır. Tezin temel amacı, Türk-Amerikan ilişkilerine dair daha derin bir kavrayış sunmak ve emperyalizm ile asimetrik ilişkiler arasındaki kavramsal karmaşayı önlemektir. Ana sav, ABD'nin uyguladığı baskının bir emperyalizm eylemi olmadığı, asimetrik bir ilişkideki kıdemli ortağın kıdemsiz ortağa karşı bir eylemi olduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Haşhaş Meselesi, Silah Ambargosu, Emperyalizm, Asimetrik İlişkiler, 1970'ler.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP: Adalet Partisi, Justice Party

ASELSAN: Askerî Elektronik Sanayi, Military Electronics Industry

BNDD: The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs

CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, Republican People's Party

DEA: Drug Enforcement Administration

HAVELSAN: Hava Elektronik Sanayi, Air Electronics Industry

INCB: International Narcotics Control Board

MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Movement Party

MSP: Millî Selâmet Partisi, National Salvation Party

TMO: Toprak Mahsulleri Ofisi, Soil Products Office

TSK: Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri, Turkish Armed Forces

TUSAŞ: Türk Havacılık ve Uzay Sanayi, Turkish aviation and space industry

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Objectives

As NATO allies and strategic partners, the Republic of Turkey and the United States of America have strong relations that have influenced regional and global politics. However, their relationship has not always been smooth, shifting between close cooperation and serious tensions. Military and political collaboration characterized their partnership, and shared interests and common threats during the Cold War were their motivations. Truman's Doctrine in 1947 and the Marshall Plan were some of the significant examples of the cooperation between the two allies. In addition, Turkey and the USA fought side by side in the Korean War against the common enemy in the 1950s. On the contrary, crises have occurred due to the differences between policies, views, conflicts, and security approaches, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, Johnson's Letter in 1964, and the Opium Crisis in 1974. These ups and downs show how complex Turkish-American relations are, shaped by changes in global politics and the internal political demands of both nations.

The United States of America imposed an arms embargo on the Republic of Turkey in 1974. Turkish academia and the public often interpreted this embargo as an

imperialistic act by the United States. However, this thesis argues that the embargo was not an imperialistic act, but a significant diplomatic crisis that emerged during the Cold War as a natural consequence of an asymmetrical alliance. This study offers a multifaceted perspective to examine the underlying reasons for the embargo, the strategic interests of both countries, internal political factors, and the clashing national interests in an alliance. I assert that the 1975 arms embargo was not primarily motivated by the United States' attempt to establish hegemonic dominance over Turkey. Instead, it was a multifaceted action triggered by the combination of various events, including illicit drug trafficking, the Cyprus issue, and internal political dynamics in both nations.¹ This perspective seeks to examine the embargo as not merely an act of imperialist aggression, but also as an example of how tensions can emerge in asymmetric alliances and eventually develop into diplomatic crises. In order to have a deeper understanding of Turkish-American Relations and the early 1970s geopolitical conditions, the Opium Crisis has to be understood better because the opium crisis and arms embargo disrupted trusting bilateral relations, undermined mutual trust, and damaged the cordial ties between the two allies.

The Opium Crisis and the following 1974 arms embargo were not separate events; they significantly transformed US-Turkish relations, radically changing the dynamics of their alliance. The Opium Crisis was related to America's growing concern regarding drug addiction in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States; thus, this situation led the U.S. to push Turkey to restrict its poppy cultivation because of the infamous French Connection. In addition, this situation naturally created significant diplomatic tension and showed Turkey's vulnerability to American

¹ United States Code, Title 22, Sec. 2370, 2010, accessed August 16, 2025, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2010-title22/html/USCODE-2010-title22-chap32-subchapIII-partI-sec2370.htm>.

demands, even at the expense of its sovereign interests and the welfare of its farmers. This incident demonstrated America's willingness to use its influence in Turkey's domestic affairs. Then, the U.S. imposed the 1975 arms embargo after Turkey's intervention in Cyprus. This situation directly hit Turkey's military capabilities and national pride. It forced Turks to acknowledge their dependence on American military assistance and encouraged a strong effort to develop their own defense industry. Both events clearly exposed the inherent tensions within the alliance. They revealed the limitations on Turkey's capacity for independent action and pushed Ankara to review its foreign policy and the extent of its strategic autonomy during the Cold War.

Moreover, international trade shaped the economy, politics, and social dynamics in the 19th and 20th centuries with commodities such as tea, coffee, opium, or oil.² Among these goods, opium had a special place in Turkish-American relations because Turkey was one of the leading producers of opium throughout history. After the American independence in 1776, the Ottoman Empire and the U.S. developed cordial ties through the opium trade.³ While scholars have extensively researched the opium trade in the context of Asian and European imperial powers, its role in Turkish-American relations has remained understudied in the aspect of transnational history. Thus, opium, as a commodity, had an integral part in bilateral relations, but it had varied meanings from period to period.⁴ For example, it meant profit in the 19th century, but it was a cause of tension during the Cold War through the transformation of drug policies.

² Jonathan Curry Machado, et al., eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Commodity History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2024), accessed February 9, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197502679.001.0001>.

³ A. Üner Turgay, "The Nineteenth Century Golden Triangle: Chinese Consumption, Ottoman Production, and the American Connection, II," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1984-1985), 116-17.

⁴ A. Üner Turgay, "Ottoman-American Trade During The 19. Century," *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, vol. 03 (June 1982), 189-192, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/112798>.

This thesis focuses on how opium shaped the asymmetrical bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States during the 1970s Cold War and how the opium crisis played a role in the questions of sovereignty, imperialism, economic interests, and illicit drug control through the lens of asymmetric relations. The Opium Crisis created a deeper crisis in Turkish-American relations because Turkey perceived the U.S. demand to ban opium cultivation as an infringement on its sovereignty. Moreover, this study aims to contribute to multiple fields of historical research, such as Turkish-American foreign relations, the history of illicit drug trafficking, organized crime studies, and commodity history. The international scholarship on opium has mostly focused on the Anglo-Chinese opium trade, the Opium Wars, and the War on Drugs campaign of President Richard M. Nixon. However, this research will contribute to the understudied area of the effect of the opium issue on the asymmetric bilateral Turkish-American relations during the Cold War.

Furthermore, existing literature, especially from Turkey, recognizes the demands from the U.S. as an act of imperialistic assault on Turkey. This study challenges the dominant interpretation by arguing that while the U.S. certainly applied significant pressure, the opium crisis and the arms embargo were more complex outcomes of an asymmetric alliance rather than a straightforward act of imperialism. It can not be both because of the existing Turkish agency and the resistance to the demands of the U.S., which shows that Turkey is not a passive actor.

1.2. Literature Review

Multiple historical, political, and economic factors shaped the complexity of Turkish-American relations. Among these factors, Turkish opium agriculture caused both conflict and cooperation between these two countries. This literature review part

seeks to examine the previous scholars' works critically and explore how opium production has influenced U.S.-Turkey relations. This thesis will research the historical context of opium cultivation in Anatolia, the role of international narcotics policies, the involvement of organized crime, and how these factors impacted asymmetric bilateral relations during the Cold War. Thus, one of the aims of this thesis is to identify the gaps in the literature and to have a deeper understanding of asymmetric bilateral relations between Turkey and the United States through the opium crisis.

The opium issue in the relations between Turkey and the United States has relatively fewer studies than the other crises. Focusing on the history of crises between Turkey and the United States is a complicated issue with multiple dimensions, such as varied national interests and regional politics, as well as the dichotomy of alliance vs. autonomy. Turkey became a member of NATO in 1952, and the relations were positively affected. However, opium was a serious issue between the two states because of the different policies and interests. On the one hand, Turkey cultivated opium for centuries and made a profit from it; on the other hand, heroin addiction was on the rise during the 1960s in the U.S., and then it became a serious problem. Even though the opium crisis attracted scholars' attention less than other crises, like the Cyprus Crisis, some prominent scholars conducted research on this issue. Lately, this literature review part consists of different subjects, such as the opium issue, the debate of American imperialism, and the asymmetry in international relations.

*The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*⁵ is a notable work by Alfred W. McCoy. In his book, he examines how U.S. foreign policy during

⁵ Alfred W. McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (New York, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991).

the Cold War contributed to the global heroin trade. The book explains how the CIA used illicit drug smuggling with various actors as a tool to stop the spread of communism. The author examined the unholy alliance between the illegal actors and the CIA in detail. The Marseille Connection, in other words, the French Connection, has a significant part in this book. He also discussed Turkey as a significant player in global heroin smuggling in the mid-20th century through opium production. He claims that Turkish opium was the major raw material for the European heroin laboratories, especially in Marseille, and this final product, heroin, was eventually smuggled to the United States. Thus, Turkey had a significant place in the French Connection as a raw material supplier. Yet, he also criticizes the American position of blaming Turkey for the Heroin epidemics in the U.S.⁶ He thinks that the main source of heroin was Southeast Asia rather than the Mediterranean. Indeed, South Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Laos had a bigger percentage of the heroin market in the U.S., but the Turkish position is still problematic because of the smuggling networks.

Ryan Gingeras' *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*⁷ is one of the contemporary sources that I will use in my thesis. In his book, he explains how the heroin trade affected Turkey's politics, economy, and society. The book also shows how the heroin industry played a key role in the Turkish political system and its relations with the United States in the 20th century. His work contributes to the historiography of organized crime and narcotics and emphasizes that the heroin trade was not a minor issue but a core factor for modern Turkey. It is also an important source for heroin traffickers' relations with the political elite and the police force. He explores the complex relations between Turkey and the United States through

⁶ Ibid. 282.

⁷ Ryan Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, & the Making of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014).

narcotics control, notably during Nixon's war on drugs. Yet, he focuses more on the organized crime history; this thesis will emphasize the asymmetry in Turkish-American relations.

*Beyaz Savaş (White War)*⁸ by Çağrı Erhan was one of the first publications in Turkey about the opium crisis between the United States and Turkey. It was published in 1996; thus, it is one of the primary works in Turkish academia. Erhan explains the historical roots of opium production and contextualizes how opium became a problem for the USA and the opium crisis itself. Furthermore, he claims that the source of the opium problem was the Golden Triangle in the Far East rather than Turkey. Thus, Burma (Today's Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand were the main veins of the smuggling networks.⁹ Yet, the Turkish position and the Turkish role in the French Connection are still an important route for heroin smuggling.

*Overdose Türkiye, Narkoelitlerden mafyaya uyuşturucunun yüzyıllık istilası*¹⁰ (*Overdose Turkey, A century-old invasion of drugs from narco-elites to the mafia*) was published first in 2004, and revised by the author himself, F. Cengiz Erdinç, in 2024. This book is one of the first works that investigates the narcotics problem in Turkey and the smuggling connections of organized crime. Thus, I will use the book to indicate that the American demands are not simple imperialistic actions but the problem of drugs in Turkey, illicit drug trafficking, organized crime, and corrupt politicians. In addition, it is one of the most detailed stories of opium that has ever been published in Turkey.

⁸ Çağrı Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş: Türk Amerikan İlişkilerinde Afyon Sorunu* (Istanbul, Turkey: Bilgi Yayınları, 1996).

⁹ Ibid. 159.

¹⁰ F. Cengiz Erdinç, *Overdose Türkiye: Narkoelitlerden Mafyaya Uyuşturucunun Yüzyıllık İstilas* (Istanbul, Turkey: Doğan Kitap, 2024).

Nuray Okumuş's *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi (1968-1975) (Poppy Cultivation Crisis in Turkish-American Relations)*¹¹ was published in 2020, and it is one of the most recent examinations of the opium crisis between the two states. In her work, she evaluated the crisis through the lens of international relations and crisis studies. As she claims, the opium crisis is over and a solved problem in bilateral relations. Moreover, she analyzes the strategies of the United States toward Turkey through crisis management and strategy, and she integrates her thesis into the neoclassical realism approach in international relations as the theoretical framework to analyze the crisis.¹² Even though her work is a significant contribution to the field, it does not relate to Turkish-American relations and the dynamics of asymmetric relations. Thus, this thesis will contribute to the asymmetric dynamics of the Turkish-American alliance.

Aytunç Altındal's *Haşhaş ve Emperyalizm (Poppies and Imperialism)*¹³ was published in 1979. It includes his writings about the opium issue from 1970 to 1974 in several newspapers, such as *Cumhuriyet* and *Akşam*, and he examines the opium issue from a Marxist perspective. He emphasized the relationship between opium poppy agriculture, drug trafficking, and imperialist strategies during the contemporary crisis. Moreover, he examines the role of poppy cultivation in the context of the March 12th Turkish Military Memorandum in 1971. He believed that the Western states, especially the United States, pressured Turkey to ban poppy farming, claiming it was to stop drug trafficking. However, he suggested that their real motive was to control Turkey and its agricultural policies and increase the influence of the United States over

¹¹ Nuray Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi (1968-1975): Kriz Yönetimi Açısından Bir İnceleme* (Ankara, Turkey: AKDITYK Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, 2020).

¹² Ibid. 9.

¹³ Aytunç Altındal, *Haşhaş ve Emperyalizm* (İstanbul, Turkey: Havass Yayınları, 1979).

Turkey. Considering the complex nature of the opium issue, his perspectives are arguably oversimplified and reductionist.¹⁴

The works above are some of the prominent sources of this understudied subject of asymmetric relations. Most of them focus on imperialism, but imperialism is not well-defined in these works, which repeats the mainstream Marxist views on imperialism. Thus, the distinction between the terms imperialism and asymmetric relations is crucial for a deeper understanding of the relations between two NATO allies. In addition, the subchapter 1.4 Concept will discuss imperialism and asymmetric relations theories in depth. The opium issue between the two states is a multifaceted, complicated, and problematic issue because of the concerns of antagonisms in bilateral relations, such as illicit drug trafficking vs. cooperation, sovereignty vs. international demands, and alliance vs. dependency. This thesis will demonstrate that legitimate concerns about illicit drug trafficking drove U.S. actions and were not imperialistic but part of complex negotiations between two NATO allies with different priorities due to the asymmetric relations. Thus, this work aims to fill the gaps in the issue's complexity rather than a reductionist perspective of imperialism studies.

1.3. Methodology and Sources

This thesis relies on primary sources like American and Turkish official archival documents such as from the Office of the Historian *Documents on Global Issues of Foreign Relations of the United States* series, *CIA's Freedom of Information Act (CIA FOIA)* collection, *T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri (Presidency of the*

¹⁴ Ibid. 12-47.

Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives), records from *Resmî Gazete* (*Official Journal of Republic of Turkey*) to evaluate the political and historical situation between Republic of Turkey and The United States of America.

Moreover, the memoirs of contemporaries like Prime Minister Nihat Erim, named *12 Mart Anılarım* (*March 12th Memoirs*), and *Günlükler 1925-1979* (*Diaries 1925-1979*) are a prominent source to understand the Turkish mindset and attitude. This thesis will also use interviews with other leading actors, such as Bülent Ecevit, from the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, in addition to Erim's works. In addition, newspapers and journals of the era, such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Meydan* from Turkey, and *the New York Times*, as well as *the Chicago Tribune* from the U.S., are also reliable sources.

Furthermore, the Turkish news documentary program *32. Gün* (*32nd Day*) by Mehmet Ali Birand is another source that I will use in my thesis to have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of American-Turkish relations and the coercion of the senior partner to the junior partner in an alliance until the 1980s. Thus, I avoid using the term imperialism for the coercion between Turkish-American relations because the American attitude toward opium production is not an imperialistic position but rather a demand in an asymmetric relation.

1.4. Concept

Imperialism is a concept that is an attempt by a state to extend and maintain influence over another state for its own interest. Extending and maintaining influence can be achieved through hard power, such as military and economic power, and soft

power, such as cultural and diplomatic power.¹⁵ Imperialism and its definition have changed through the ages, like classical imperialism, like the Roman Empire, Imperial China, and Ottoman Empire's policies, and modern imperialism, such as the policies implemented by the Western colonial empires, such as the British and French Empires. Thus, imperialism can take different forms through different eras: Colonial, economic, political, and cultural imperialism. For instance, colonial imperialism is a form in which a state directly controls the region and its people; economic imperialism is the form of the economic influence of the dominant nation over the minor nation, and political imperialism is the type that stronger nation influence and manipulate the weaker nation's policies to serve their interests and limit weaker nation's sovereignty.

While imperialism is the direct domination and exploitation of the weaker states, asymmetry in an alliance describes the partnership where power imbalances exist. Still, they do not eliminate the junior partner's agency and sovereignty. In an asymmetrical alliance, the senior partner uses its military, economic, diplomatic, and political power to influence the junior one. In the case of the opium crisis, the senior partner is from the United States, and the junior is from Turkey. However, American power over Turkey was limited because Turkey had its agency, diplomatic negotiation perspective, channels, and resistance, and it followed policies for the sake of its national interests that did not match the senior partner's interests.

The distinction of the terms is significant for this thesis. Otherwise, the interpretations would be reductionist and inadequate. Thus, the differentiation of imperialism and colonialism is a hot topic in academic discourse. Scholars like Krishan Kumar and Barbara Arneil distinguish between imperialism and colonialism.

¹⁵ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Imperialism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last updated July 28, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/imperialism>.

In addition, Yasuki Kudo's and Mayumi Fukushima's theses on asymmetric alliances are some of the prominent sources that I will use in my thesis to interpret the Turkish-American relations through the opium issue. However, in this thesis, I do not intend to discuss the opium crisis in the context of an imperialistic relationship. Still, I intend to discuss it in the scope of an asymmetric relationship between two NATO allies. Thus, ignoring the Turkish agency is a biased view because Turkey is not a passive actor in bilateral relations but a junior partner. Therefore, the distinction between imperialism and the asymmetric relationship resembles the distinction between imperialism and colonialism debate. Thus, this distinction in the relations of these two NATO allies is crucial for understanding and commenting on the opium issue. Indeed, the power imbalance exists in Turkish-American relations; however, Turkish resistance and negotiations were the central features of the opium crisis. Since Turkey has its agency, independent policies, and resistance to American demands, the problem between the U.S. and Turkey is more related to an example of an asymmetrical relationship than American imperialist attitudes. Hence, reading the opium issue through the lens of the concept of asymmetric relations between two states would give a clearer image of the issue.

There are several works that I will benefit from on the subject of asymmetric relations and the distinction of the concepts. Firstly, Krishan Kumar's article *Colony and Empire, Colonialism and Imperialism: A Meaningful Distinction?*¹⁶ was published in 2021. In his article, he criticizes and conceptualizes the concepts of colonialism and imperialism. He claims that scholars often use two terms as synonyms but are naturally distinct. Thus, the distinction can help to interpret the age of

¹⁶ Krishan Kumar, "Colony and Empire, Colonialism and Imperialism: A Meaningful Distinction?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 2 (2021): 280–309, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417521000050>.

imperialism better. Secondly, Barbara Arneil's article from 2024, *Colonialism versus Imperialism*¹⁷, emphasizes why the distinction between the two terms is crucial for theoretical clarity, understanding of the contemporary forms of domination, historical accuracy, and analysis. Thirdly, Yasuki Kudo's *Rewarding loyalty: Selective reassurance and enforcement of asymmetric alliances*¹⁸, which was published in 2024, highlights that senior partners form alliances to have more control over their junior partners in return for the security of the junior partners. However, due to the autonomy of the junior partner, compliance is challenging, and sometimes, the cooperation of two allies is interrupted by conflicting interests. Consequently, the dynamics of Turkish-American relations are, by nature, asymmetric, and this article is one of the bases for my thesis. Lastly, Mayumi Fukushima's PhD. Thesis from 2020, *Exploitative Friendships: Manipulating Asymmetric Alliances*¹⁹ focuses on the relations between various senior and junior allies during the Cold War. Her approach to Turkish-American relations is "the combination of low dependence and limited coordination with its senior partner". Hence, I will benefit from this thesis in interpreting the opium problem between the two states through the lens of asymmetric alliance.

1.5. Scheme of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Firstly, Chapter I gives the background information on the sources, methodology, objectives, and the central argument of the thesis. Chapter II focuses on the background of opium in Anatolia and the origins of the crisis, and Chapter III concentrates on the opium ban in Turkey and the following

¹⁷ Barbara Arneil, "Colonialism versus Imperialism," *Political Theory*, 52 no:1 (2024): 146-176, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00905917231193107>.

¹⁸ Yasuki Kudo, "Rewarding Loyalty: Selective reassurance and enforcement of asymmetric alliances," *Journal of Peace Research* (Dec 30, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433241292270>.

¹⁹ Mayumi Fukushima, "Exploitative friendships: manipulating asymmetric alliances," (PhD Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2020), <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/130600>.

issues. Then, Chapter IV stresses the revocation of the poppy ban and the arms embargo. Finally, Chapter V analyzes the events through the lens of asymmetric relations, comments, and further research possibilities.



CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF THE CRISIS

2.1. Introduction

In June 1971, the Turkish government, led by Prime Minister Nihat Erim, decided to ban opium production all over Turkey. This decision was a turning point in Turkish-American relations and for the interior policies. American pressure to stop the illicit heroin trade to the United States was often seen as the reason for this decision, but the history of opium production in Anatolia made the real story more complicated. Thus, this chapter discusses the roots of the opium production in Turkey before the ban of 1971, to provide background information about the history of poppy production in Turkey, international drug controls, and the asymmetric nature of Turkey-U.S. relations during the Cold War. Through analyzing the previous events and histories, this chapter explains the history of Turkish opium production, Turkey's place in the narcotics production and control, and the growing problems between the two NATO allies. Hence, this chapter aims to give a clear understanding of the origins of the crisis, which had a profound impact on Turkish home affairs and its relationship with the leader of the bloc during the Cold War.

2.2. The History of Opium in Anatolia

The agriculture of the opium poppies is not a recent phenomenon, but has a long history in Anatolia. Opium poppy is native to Anatolia or the Levant; thus, people have used the opium throughout the ages, not only as a medicine, but also for recreational purposes. According to Martin Booth's *Opium: A History*, he claims that the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*, is native to Asia Minor, and it grows around the regions of the Mediterranean shores. It was also used as an ornamental plant; moreover, only two species of poppy contain a significant amount of opium: *Papaver somniferum* and *Papaver bracteatum*. Thus, farmers in Anatolia widely cultivated *Papaver somniferum*.²⁰ As a result of opium agriculture in Anatolia by the previous civilizations, farmers of the Ottoman Empire also continued to produce opium poppies besides wheat and barley; furthermore, opium's importance increased during the centuries, especially in the 19th century, because of the opium trade.

As an emerging power, the United States had its own interests in the newly emerged trade liberalization and globalization. Therefore, like any other nation, the United States had to find new markets, raw materials, and places to export its manufactured goods. Hence, relations between the Ottoman Empire and the United States started through commerce and the security of American merchants.²¹

Among the many commodities that were grown in the Ottoman Empire, opium had a special place. People planted opium throughout history in Anatolia, and opium

²⁰ Martin Booth, *Opium: A History* (New York, USA: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 1-3.

²¹ Ayşegül Avcı, "Yankee Levantine: David Offley and Ottoman-American Relations in the Early Nineteenth Century," (PhD diss., İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2016), 7-10, https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezDetay.jsp?id=7f2HrShLOWHBmIUfH_CwXg&no=XCtkAqOrUDBY1FHKm-6GiQ.

poppies were used for medical purposes and as a spice and drug. Thus, the recreational use of opium was one of the primary reasons for the emerging opium trade. For example, on the one hand, opium milk and its paste have been used for narcotic purposes for centuries; on the other hand, poppy seeds were also important as a spice and food flavoring for regional cuisine. Moreover, the plant's leftover poppies became animal food, fertilizer, and roofing material.²² While the opium trade is often associated with the British Empire, the case of Turkish opium and its trade with American merchants shows a critical phase in Ottoman-American relations.

As a consequence of this trade between the two countries, Ottoman opium had a worldwide impact in the age of liberalization and globalization. During the nineteenth century, opium production and trade rapidly grew in the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, the American motivation was to meet the trade deficit between the United States and Qing China and make a profit; on the other hand, the Ottoman motivation was to bring money to the Empire to balance its budget. Thus, the opium trade between Americans and Ottomans benefited both sides.

But why was Anatolian opium high in demand, and why did it occupy a significant amount of the Ottoman export balance? There are several reasons for this question. First of all, Turkish opium had the highest morphine content in comparison with Malwa and Bengal opium. For example, according to Poroy,

The farmers recognize two kinds of opium in Anatolia: high-quality or soft opium (*âlâ* or *hâlis*) and low-quality, druggist or *rakoze* (*rascusé* or *konaklı*). The latter is so called not only because of its low morphine content but also because of the deliberate practice of collecting the scrapings from the poppy sac with the juice.²³

²² Ibrahim Ihsan Poroy, "Expansion of Opium Production in Turkey and the State Monopoly of 1828-1839," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2 (1981): 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/162820>.

²³ Ibid. 196.

Secondly, the American-British opium trade competition in China had an impact on Anatolian poppy production. India was in the British sphere of influence; therefore, Americans needed to find new areas that produced opium to sell it in Qing China. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire was one of the leading producers of opium poppy in the World. Opium poppy cultivation and the production of opium gum were one of the crucial agricultural activities in Anatolia. Moreover, the higher alkaloid content and the consistency of the opium production provided a high demand for Ottoman opium in the market. As a result of the increasing demand, higher and more satisfactory prices made it a cash crop; therefore, the opium production in the Ottoman Empire increased rapidly in the nineteenth century because of the high profitability and demand in the global markets.²⁴

Turkish opium was also a significant commodity for the American merchants who sought alternatives to the British-controlled Indian opium for the Chinese market. This American quest also increased Ottoman opium production, because the market expanded in China. After the American Revolution, entrepreneurs from the United States became interested in the opportunities in commerce via Smyrna. Moreover, the first Americans who probably started their business in Smyrna were James and Benjamin C. Wilcocks. American ships had been visiting Smyrna before, but it was not until 1804 that ships from Philadelphia and Baltimore began trading there regularly. Significant merchants in the American drug trade from Smyrna to China were James and Benjamin C. Wilcocks. James arrived in Smyrna in 1804 as the supercargo of the brig *Pennsylvania*.²⁵ I think their business in Smyrna to China was

²⁴ Ibid. 202.

²⁵ Jacques M. Downs, "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-1840," *The Business History Review* 42, no. 4 (1968): 419, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3112527>.

the baby steps for the Ottoman-Chinese-American triangular trade, in other words, from A. Üner Turgay, *The 19th Century Golden Triangle*.²⁶

The triangular trade between the Ottoman Empire, the United States, and Qing China was an important trade route. Still, historians researched this route's history less than the British opium trade to China. As a result of the establishment of this route by Americans, the Ottoman Empire became one of the primary producers of opium; the demand for opium raised in global markets, Ottomans benefited from the opium trade, Smyrna as the port city became richer as well as the American merchants who were in the opium business. The only losing side was the Qing China, therefore in the following years, the First Opium War would begin in 1839. Thus, the Ottoman-American trade in the nineteenth century affected China the most, but Ottomans and Americans were the beneficiaries of this triangular trade. The primary motivation for American merchants was profit; therefore, they tried to capitalize on the demand in China. The merchants sold Turkish opium for silver in China to balance the trade deficit between China and the U.S. The quality of Turkish opium was one of the main reasons for this trade because it was more profitable.²⁷

The triangular trade was complex and profitable. The American vessels brought American goods such as coffee, sugar, tea, rum, pepper, and candles to Smyrna. In return, they bought opium, boxwood, wool, rose oil, figs, raisins, copper, olive oil, and carpets from the Ottoman Empire, and the merchants sold opium in China. According to Turgay,

²⁶ Turgay, "Ottoman American Trade During the 19th Century," 213-14.

²⁷ Turgay, "The 19th-Century Golden Triangle: Chinese Consumption, Ottoman Production and the American Connection," 108.

The total American imports from the Ottoman Empire for 1828 added up to \$498,533 compared with her exports of \$202,941. Opium, with \$308,738, and raisins and figs, with \$47,477, made up the bulk of the American imports.²⁸

To sum up this chapter, the opium trade in the nineteenth century is an interesting case study of the complexities inherent in global commerce during this era of rapid change and globalization. The Smyrna Connection, an integral part of this global network, facilitated a triangular trade route that intertwined American merchants, Turkish opium producers, and Chinese markets. American merchants had technological advancements like clipper ships to sail quickly and efficiently across the oceans. Opium, textiles, and spices were among the many commodities that drove a thriving cross-continental trade that significantly impacted the Ottoman and American economies.

Before 1971, poppy farming was an important product for the farmers of central and western Anatolia. It was one of the major sources of income and had an integral part in their lifestyles beyond its illicit potential. For example, people used the seeds in Turkish regional cuisine as a spice and for obtaining oil. In addition, the dried stalks and capsules could be used for animal feed or fuel, as well as roofing material. Because poppies had many different uses, local people felt that growing them was normal and acceptable. For many years, farming poppies was a legal and traditional way of life that people depended on. The government also approved of it, giving out licenses that allowed people to grow poppies.²⁹

The main area for opium production in Turkey was Afyonkarahisar. Besides Afyonkarahisar, Uşak, Konya, Denizli, Isparta, and Burdur, the surrounding cities of

²⁸ Turgay, "Ottoman American Trade During Nineteenth Century," 199-200.

²⁹ James Windle, "A very gradual suppression: A history of Turkish opium controls, 1933–1974." *European Journal of Criminology* 11, no. 2 (2014): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370813494818>.

Afyonkarahisar were the heartland of Turkish poppy farming. This part of Turkey, especially the Southwestern part, had specific soil types and climatic conditions suitable for the opium poppies throughout the centuries. Because poppy farming was such a core part of life and the local economy, it was tough to change, even when people outside of the region wanted to limit or stop it. For the farmers and areas that depended on poppies, being told to stop was not just a small change in farming policy; on the contrary, it felt like a direct attack on their way of making a living and their traditions.³⁰ This difference in understanding was a major political issue for the Turkish government before 1971. The huge gap between the everyday reality of the Anatolian poppy farmer and the increasing international pressure about Turkish opium production created an underlying problem that was leading to a crisis. But what really happened and how Turkey dealt with the opium production during the period of 1923 to 1960?

Though the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 brought great political and social change, poppy farming continued in Turkey. Especially in places where other cash crops were rare or less profitable, the agricultural sector heavily depended on poppies, as the young Republic inherited. The economic importance continued, and for a sizable portion of the rural population, poppy farming gave livelihoods; moreover, it produced export money that was vital for the growing national economy.³¹ The conventional techniques of farming and gum harvesting, using careful scoring of the unripe capsules, stayed mostly the same.

³⁰ James W. Spain, "The United States, Turkey and the Poppy," *Middle East Journal* 29, no. 3 (1975): 305, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4325379>.

³¹ Erdiñç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 44-45.

The Republican era also brought a more centralized approach to state administration and economic management. This situation resulted in changing efforts at state control over strategic agricultural products. The establishment of the *Tekel İdaresi* (The General Directorate of State Monopolies) is important in this case. While primarily associated with tobacco and alcohol, Tekel reflected the Kemalist state's efforts towards controlling key economic sectors through the principle of statism. Over time, Tekel and later, the Toprak Mahsulleri Ofisi (TMO-Soil Products Office), was established in 1938, and became an instrument through which the state sought to regulate poppy cultivation. The government's main goal was to control poppy farming by licensing farmers and deciding the agricultural zones where the poppies were grown.³² In addition, they also aimed to standardize how they bought the crops and make as much revenue as possible for the state. Preventing illegal activities was not the top priority then, though that concern grew later, especially with international pressure. Therefore, the legacy passed from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic was complicated. A continuation of agricultural traditions and economic dependence overlaid with the beginning of modern state control mechanisms that would later become central in the international dimensions of the poppy issue.

2.3. Socio-economic Dimensions

To understand the significance of poppy farming for the economy and society, especially in some areas of western and central Anatolia, it is necessary to clarify the context prior to 1971. The center of Turkish poppy farming was important to the

³² Mustafa Salep, "Türkiye- Amerika İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekiminin Yasaklanması Meselesi," *Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 5, no. 47 (June 2017): 355.

provinces such as Afyonkarahisar, Uşak, Konya, Kütahya, Denizli, Isparta, and Burdur. In addition, Afyonkarahisar's name literally translates into English, Black Opium Castle, revealing its historical importance for that region. Thus, opium was not only a crop, but it was a significant commodity for the local farmers. The soil type and weather were suitable for growing opium; thus, it was the main cash crop in these areas.

The average poppy farmer's land was usually a smallholding. For these families, the poppy harvest was their main source of cash income for the year; thus, it was required for debt payment and meeting basic needs. The entire family, including women and children, worked hard to score the poppy capsules and collect the raw opium gum during the short harvest season.³³ This case made opium farming very labor-intensive and a crucial part of the family's working schedule.

Apart from the illegal possibilities of the opium gum, the poppy plant presented advantages as well. The seeds have financial and nutritional value, and are extracted from edible oil, used as a seasoning, and consumed in regional cuisine. After gum extraction, the dried stalks and capsules could be used as fuel or animal feed, thus optimizing a resource that is vital in situations of subsistence farming. These usages strengthened the validity of poppy farming from the perspective of the local people. Growing opium was a legal, traditional, and necessary way of life, which the government approved.³⁴

³³ William H. Brundage and William A. Mitchell, "Toward an Understanding of Opium Poppy Production in Turkey." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 12, nos. 1-4 (1977): 261-2, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852177X00152>.

³⁴ Ibid. 262-3.

Hence, opium farming was important to Turkey's society and economy, and people felt a direct threat to their way of life from the demands to stop producing. It was even more challenging to ban since a few easily produced and profitable goods existed. Before 1971, this domestic view, which the officials often ignored in international discussions that only focused on drug trafficking, was a very important political issue for the Turkish government. It created a conflict between the reality of the Anatolian poppy farmer and global concerns about Turkish opium, which eventually led to a crisis.

2.4. International Control and Leakage Problem

Poppy cultivation was integral to Anatolian life; however, the Twentieth century saw the emergence of a global initiative aimed at regulating the production and trade of narcotic drugs. This attempt additionally established obligations for producer countries such as Turkey, resulting in tension between domestic conditions and international commitments, especially regarding the ongoing issue of smuggling, in other words, leakage, the diversion of both legally and illegally produced opium into illicit markets.

The 1912 Hague Opium Convention, 1925, and 1931 Geneva Conventions were some early efforts at global control over drugs. Still, they reached a critical consolidation point with the adoption of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Targeting only medical and scientific uses, this treaty aimed to simplify past agreements, limit the cultivation, production, manufacturing, and trade of specific narcotic substances, such as opium, coca, and cannabis, thus establishing strong worldwide control mechanisms mostly via the International Narcotics Control Board

(INCB). Moreover, Turkey's participation was crucial for the Convention's success as one of the world's traditional and significant licit opium growers, along with countries like India, Yugoslavia, and the USSR. Turkey approved the Convention in 1967 following its signing in 1961; therefore, Turkey formally embraced a set of obligations meant to ensure that the legal opium production did not support the illicit global market.³⁵

The 1961 Convention established several important guidelines for opium output. It said, first, that opium should only be used for scientific and medical ends. Poppies were only grown by licensed farmers in limited areas approved by the government to manage this. The government held complete control over buying opium from farmers, often through an agency like the TMO. At first, they would buy the raw opium gum. But policies changed, and they started buying the whole poppy capsule instead. This move was a smart decision to stop farmers from extracting the gum themselves, which could be sold to smugglers. In addition, countries also had to be transparent, sharing their yearly plans for how much land they would use for poppies, how much they expected to produce, and what their own country's needs were. And, a crucial goal was to prevent any opium from being illegally leaked into drug trafficking. The main issue was to stop leakage, even if the methods changed over time.³⁶

Through these commitments, Turkey assumed responsibility to the global community. Although Turkish governments consistently assert their commitment to the convention, they have encountered significant challenges in implementing its provisions effectively. These challenges resulted in increased inspections from other

³⁵ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 57-82.

³⁶ Salep, "Türkiye-Amerika İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekiminin Yasaklanması Meselesi," 355-6.

nations, especially the United States. The disparity between the requirements of the 1961 Convention and the actual implementation of ground control emerged as a significant point of concern.

The 1961 Convention was the main source of the rules that the Turkish government used to control the cultivation of poppies. In time, from the 60s to the 70s, the number of producing counties dropped from more than twelve to seven, at first; and then, only four provinces were left that had been allowed to grow poppies.³⁷ These farmers had to obtain licenses, and the TMO was the only authorized buyer of opium products, firstly opium gum, then capsules. The police and the *Jandarma* (Gendarmerie) had to follow these guidelines. They also had to stop illicit farming and arrest those who smuggled opium from Turkey.³⁸

The Turkish government implemented a system largely aligned with the 1961 Convention, officially restricting poppy cultivation to a shrinking number of designated provinces and requiring licenses for farmers within these zones. The government designated the TMO as the sole legal buyer of opium, and tasked the Gendarmerie and police forces with enforcing regulations, preventing unlicensed cultivation, and interdicting smuggled opium. These issues made it difficult to keep things under control. However, leaks continued even with these measures because transportation and geography also made it difficult to monitor mountainous rural areas. Diversion had large financial benefits because black market prices were much higher than the official TMO rate. This situation encouraged farmers to sell to smugglers.³⁹

³⁷ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 98-102.

³⁸ Windle, "A Very Gradual Suppression," 6.

³⁹ Morgan F. Murphy and Robert H. Steele, *The World Heroin Problem: Report of Special Study Mission*, 92nd Cong., 1st sess., May 27, 1971, Document no. CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060002-1, Committee Print, 1971, 5, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060002-1.pdf>.

For heroin, there was a sizable black market in Western Europe and North America during the 1960s.⁴⁰ This demand produced a strong pull that maintained smuggling networks intact and prices high. Anatolia was a historical crossroads for established smuggling networks to transport illegal opium across the Balkans or by sea to secret labs in Marseille.⁴¹ The Turkish government often lacked resources and training; thus, corruption worsened things. Moreover, corruption could make control more difficult to sustain. Finally, it was difficult to get precise figures for leakage; therefore, estimations were erratic and frequently influenced by the objectives of the people who generated them. As a result, even with Turkey's promises to stop it, a large amount of opium kept permeating the international illegal trade. This leakage became the most important global problem and the main justification for U.S. pressure on other countries.

2.5. The Alliance and the First Frictions

Tensions about the cultivation of poppies in Turkey increased in the 1960s. This situation is only understandable within the framework of the Cold War and the uniqueness of the strategic alliance between Turkey and the United States. Although both countries gained geopolitical benefits from their relationship, an imbalance and asymmetry existed. That gave the U.S. great authority, which it later used in the opium matter, because it was an asymmetric relationship.

After World War II, Turkey's geopolitical position became an important issue at the beginning of the Cold War. It had a long border with the Soviet Union and was

⁴⁰ Catherine Lamour and Michel Lamberti, *Eroin Dosyası* (Turkey: Milliyet Yayınları, 1973), 108.

⁴¹ Ibid. 38.

in charge of the main straits that connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Soon afterwards, Turkey became an important ally for the United States in its fight to stop the spread of Soviet influence because of its location.

The Truman Doctrine of 1947 was the basis of Turkish-American relations during the Cold War. The Doctrine was about the American military and economic support to Turkey and Greece for protecting them from the communist threat. After the war, Turkey's economy started to develop with the help of the Marshall Plan. Moreover, in 1952, Turkey joined NATO to defend itself from possible Soviet attacks and became a crucial part of the Western security architecture. Under this alliance, the United States stationed troops, equipment, and even nuclear weapons in Turkey. On the one hand, to modernize its armed forces and boost its economy, Turkey sought stable and substantial military and financial assistance from the United States; on the other hand, the United States needed Turkey for the Eastern Mediterranean and to stop Soviet expansion into the South.

Still, this close cooperation created an asymmetric relationship between Turkey and the United States. Turkey developed mostly with financial support and security derived from the U.S. Turkey's demand for American aid and political support gave Washington greater control over Ankara's decisions, much as a stronger senior partner guides the weaker junior one in an alliance. The reason behind the disputes over poppy cultivation was this underlying reliance. Any American demand or request, no matter how small it seemed, had great weight because it could influence the whole security and aid cooperation.

In the 1960s, the United States began to become more concerned as heroin use increased in the U.S.⁴² One of the primary causes of this problem was the accessibility of obtaining illegal heroin, even though social issues and the Vietnam War were other contributing factors.⁴³ As the BNDD (The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs) was established in 1967, an increasing number of U.S. law enforcement and drug control officials asserted that the main cause of the heroin epidemic in American cities across the country was Turkish opium.⁴⁴

Government and intelligence services claim that up to 80% of the heroin detected in the United States at this period was Turkish opium.⁴⁵ The Corsican crime syndicate, also known as the French Connection, smuggled this opium mostly to Marseille. They handled it in illegal, covert labs before selling it in the profitable American market. Whether these numbers were entirely accurate or somehow exaggerated for political purposes, they became the accepted story inside the U.S. government and media.

This situation changed the perspective of American officials on the Turkish poppy problem: it was no longer only a distant farming issue but a serious threat endangering public health and law and order at home. American governments responded to the heroin flow under public growing concern, media coverage, and political pressure. Intelligence services indicated Turkey was the primary source of the heroin; thus, diplomatic pressure on Ankara became a central component of the U.S. anti-drug policy. The aim has changed from supporting improved controls to

⁴² Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 76-9.

⁴³ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, 258.

⁴⁴ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized, Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 178.

⁴⁵ Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, "Subject: Opium Production," *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972, Document no. 188129*, (Washington DC: U.S. Department of State, 1969), 1, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e1/45856.htm>.

demanding more forceful policies, such as the total prohibition of poppy farming in Turkey.⁴⁶

The American officials used diplomatic channels to push Turkey to ban opium production. Earlier contacts had a great impact on the Turkish opium policy. Through these discussions, Turkey reduced the number of its provinces that farm opium. Süleyman Demirel's government took these actions. He tried to act in a balance between the national and the international demands. Thus, Turkish officials confirmed their allegiance to international treaties such as the 1961 Convention, besides acknowledging the existence of a smuggling issue with these words: "Although there are exaggerated versions of these accusations and these are answered on every occasion, it is inevitable to accept that there is a considerable amount of truth in the accusations made."⁴⁷

However, the Turkish government resisted the calls for a total ban. They emphasized Turkey's right under international law to grow poppies for scientific and legal medical uses. Moreover, they highlighted the major social and financial issues a ban would bring about for hundreds of thousands of small-scale farmers and their families. In addition, officials emphasized that there were no other easily available crops that could bring in as much money in those areas, but they also would suggest to the farmers the oilseeds.⁴⁸ Turkish officials doubted the accuracy of U.S. estimates about how much opium was being illegally diverted, sometimes suggesting that the U.S. was unfairly blaming Turkey for its own domestic drug problems and its inability

⁴⁶ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁷ Başbakanlık Özel Kalem Müdürlüğü, *Memleketimizde haşhaş ekimine ve afyon istihsaline ait durumun gözden geçirilmesi ve bu hususta mevcut anlaşma ve protokollara riyyeti sağlayacak tedbirlerin alınması hakkında müşterek rapor*, Yer Bilgisi: 82-516-8, Dosya Ek: E12 (Ankara: T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Arşivi, June 23, 1966), 1-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2.

to stop processed heroin from entering its borders.⁴⁹ Thus, the ban after the military memorandum would soften the relations to reach a consensus.

2.6. Conclusion

Early in the 1970s, ingrained historical, economic, and geopolitical elements would lead to a major crisis over Turkish poppy production. Anatolia's centuries of poppy farming had produced a strong local identity and socio-economic dependence, defended inside Turkish domestic politics. Meanwhile, Turkey's integration into the post-war international order, especially its adherence to the 1961 Single Convention, imposed obligations to control production and prevent diversion, which proved difficult to fulfill given logistical difficulties and strong economic incentives for illegal smuggling. The special dynamic of the Turkish-American strategic alliance made this even more difficult: While vital for Turkish security, this alliance developed a dependency that let the United States, confronting its own rising heroin crisis, mostly (80%) caused by Turkish opium, according to U.S. documents.⁵⁰ In addition, the U.S. put pressure on Ankara to ban poppy production. Rising American discontent over opium and Turkish resistance to American demands defined the diplomatic struggle during the 1960s. The crisis also revealed the growing disparity between the two allies' national interests and internal political pressure. Lastly, the opium issue was a complex phenomenon resulting from the combination of many factors. These factors were deep-rooted agricultural traditions, economic struggles, the ongoing problem of illegal drug trafficking, international legal agreements, and asymmetric elements within the

⁴⁹ Ayhan Songar, *Haşhaş Meselesi ve Türkiye* (Istanbul, Turkey: Hareket Yayınları, 1974), 55-6.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Subject: Opium Production," 1.

partnership. Thus, the poppy cultivation in Anatolia was at the center of diplomatic relations during the 1970s.



CHAPTER III

THE OPIUM BAN IN TURKEY AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

3.1. Introduction

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a difficult time for both the U.S. and Turkey. The United States faced the devastation caused by the Vietnam War, an increased crime rate, and a rapidly worsening heroin problem among youth. Turkey was also in the middle of military memoranda, a worsening economy, and unstable governments. These events were related and put poppies at the center of a global crisis. In addition, the War on Drugs that the U.S. started put great political and diplomatic pressure on Turkey. These circumstances ultimately resulted in the decision of Prime Minister Nihat Erim's government to ban opium cultivation completely in 1971.

This section will show how the U.S. put increased pressure on Turkey, the conditions under the ban decision, its initial implementation, and the socio-economic impacts in Turkey.. This chapter highlights not only the asymmetric nature of relations between the two countries but also how international policies can deeply affect a nation's internal dynamics.

3.2. The War on Drugs

The War on Drugs is not only a famous rock band's name, but also Richard M. Nixon's policy. President Richard Nixon declared the war on drugs in June 1971 and called drug abuse as "the public enemy number one."⁵¹ Nixon made this statement because of a general concern about illegal drugs and the thought that drug use was on the rise, especially heroin addiction among Vietnam veterans. Turkey was affected by these anti-drug policies. Due to the central position of the French Connection, Turkish opium production was a target for American officials. Under U.S. pressure, Turkey banned opium poppy farming in 1971, aiming to cut off heroin supply to the U.S. This ban initially reduced U.S. heroin addiction by limiting morphine base for French labs for a short term until the smugglers found other roots.⁵²

Before Nixon's presidency in 1968, he pledged to maintain law and order. People required this message due to their concerns regarding anti-war protests, the civil rights movement, and the increase in criminal activity. Individuals perceived drug use, especially heroin addiction, as a significant cause of this disorder. The rising crime rates in urban areas and increased people's expenditures, thus, made the drug issue was a pressing national security concern. Moreover, the situation got worse further due to the significant number of soldiers returning from the Vietnam War who were addicted to heroin. Many veterans who were traumatized by the war and had trouble finding a job and reintegrating when they got home, thus they fell into the trap

⁵¹ Richard M. Nixon, "Public Enemy Number One: A Pragmatic Approach to America's Drug Problem," Blog, Richard Nixon Foundation, accessed August 23, 2025. <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2016/06/26404/>.

⁵² Central Intelligence Agency, *Narcotics Country Papers: Near East and South Asia*, Briefing Paper, March 1972, Document no. CIA-RDP78-00052R000100100005-2, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, 18, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00052R000100100005-2.pdf>.

of cheap and easy-to-find Southeast Asian heroin.⁵³ This situation was a political scandal and a disaster for the American people. The Nixon administration's campaign against drugs aimed not only to address social issues but also to re-establish state authority, combat crime, and strengthen his conservative constituency.

On the other hand, the Nixon Doctrine tried to get the U.S. out of some military missions around the world and make its allies take more responsibility for their own defense. But this did not mean that the U.S. was giving up on its interests in other countries. Instead, the U.S. could use its economic and political power over its allies to get its demand. If heroin came from other countries, those countries had to take responsibility for it. If they could not, they should be put under pressure. Therefore, the War on Drugs had an international dimension, as the Nixon administration sought collaboration with international allies to cut off drug trafficking. This effort aligned with the Nixon Doctrine's general idea of cooperating with allies and finding local solutions to regional problems. However, it was more of a reflection of overall foreign policy trends than a direct link between the two policies, namely the Nixon Doctrine and the War on Drugs, because, according to Eremin and Petrovich-Belkin, “the ‘War on Drugs’ was never a priority in the conditions of the Cold War.”⁵⁴ To sum up, the American government had to make tough choices in foreign policy because the heroin issue put a lot of pressure on the government. This new policy made it easy to attack allies like Turkey, which needed help from the U.S. and was important to the U.S. strategically in the asymmetric alliance.

⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency, *Narcotics Country Papers: Near East and South Asia*, Briefing Paper, May 27, 1971, Document no. CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060002-1, CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room, 1, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP73B00296R000300060002-1.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Arkadiy Eremin and Oleg Petrovich-Belkin, “The ‘War on Drugs’ Concept as the Basis for Combating Drugs in the Western Hemisphere,” *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, (2019): 44, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335527934_The_'War_on_Drugs'_Concept_as_the_Basis_for_Combating_Drugs_in_the_Western_Hemisphere.

Nixon's declaration of the War on Drugs was not just rhetoric, but also it entailed a significant restructuring and strengthening of federal anti-narcotics enforcement agencies. The BNDD, established in 1968, emerged as the primary force in this conflict. The BNDD's budget, staff, and power grew rapidly. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was formed in 1973, and it became the general organization.⁵⁵ Thus, this made the agency more powerful and centralized.

New strategies backed up this new way of organizing institutions. While the government set aside money for programs to treat and stop addiction at home, the main goal of the fight was to cut off the supply. This plan was for focusing on the countries that were known to be the source of drugs. The U.S. worked with these countries under the name of international cooperation. But this cooperation was often just a list of demands from one side and a way to put pressure on the other, like the case of the opium in Turkey.⁵⁶

The U.S. had a two-part plan. First, it offered training, technical assistance, and equipment to anti-drug units in certain countries, aiming to encourage cooperation. Second, it used economic and diplomatic pressure to force those same countries to adopt American policies.⁵⁷ Members of Congress stepped up the pressure by suggesting laws that would cut off foreign aid to countries that were sources of drugs. The officials criticized these countries and sent diplomatic notes.⁵⁸ The main goal was

⁵⁵ U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, "History," accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.dea.gov/about/history#:~:text=Since%20its%20founding%20in%201973,members%20involved%20in%20the%20growing%2C>.

⁵⁶ Central Intelligence Agency, *The Suppression of Poppy Production in Turkey*, Document no. CIA-RDP82S00205R000100150002-6, CREST, (Washington, DC: CIA, October 23, 2000): 11-15, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82s00205r000100150002-6>.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 14.

⁵⁸ Daniel P. Moynihan, "143. Memorandum from the Assistant to the President (Moynihan) to Attorney General Mitchell," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969–1972*. (Washington, DC: Office of the Historian, 1969), accessed July 27, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/d143>.

to convince or force countries that grow poppies to stop growing them altogether or put strict controls in place. Turkey, which has long been a major producer of opium poppies and a major source of heroin that arrives in the U.S., became a key target in this global plan.

3.3. The French Connection

The French Connection was a heroin smuggling ring. The raw opium, which was grown in Turkey, was smuggled to the heroin labs in Marseille, France, by the smugglers through Syria and Lebanon.⁵⁹ This network gained significant public and political attention and was exposed and widely depicted in popular culture. Therefore, the U.S. focused on Turkey in its war on drugs, and saw it as the main source of the heroin problem.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, A complex international network was at the back of the source of a significant portion of the high-quality heroin entering the U.S. The basic route of this network worked as follows: Opium gum or base morphine, obtained from poppies legally or illegally grown in Turkey, especially in the Western and Central Anatolian regions, such as Afyonkarahisar, Uşak, Denizli, and Konya, was smuggled out of the country. This raw opium usually made its way to Marseille via land or sea, through Syria or Lebanon. Turkish opium transformed high-purity heroin in secret labs run by Corsican mafia groups in Marseille. In the end, this produced heroin sent across the Atlantic in different ways and ended up in cities on the East Coast of the U.S., mostly New York.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 93-108.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 108-12.

While this smuggling network had been known for a while, it hit the public spotlight in the late 1960s and early 1970s through joint operations by U.S. and French anti-narcotics units and leaked information to the press, especially with the publication of the movie series called *The French Connection* in 1971.⁶¹ *The French Connection*, which was based on Robin Moore's 1969 book of the same name, told this route very clearly and dramatically. With its success at the box office, it influenced public opinion. It won five Academy Awards, such as Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Director, Best Film Editing, and Best Adapted Screenplay.⁶² Therefore, the success of the movie made people aware of the seriousness of the heroin problem in the U.S. The movie showed how opium from Turkey was turned into heroin in Marseille and then brought into the U.S. illegally. Many Americans now saw Turkey as directly linked to illegal heroin coming into the country. This perception made it clear that Turkey would face increased political pressure. Thus, the narrative of the Turkey-France-U.S. route was spread to the public, leading to Turkey being blamed for the troubles' origin.

Instead of tackling its drug issues, the U.S. focused on stopping drugs from entering the country. This strategy inevitably targeted the nations where the drugs originated, and as the *French Connection* story gained traction, Turkey became the prime suspect. But why was Turkey actually the scapegoat of the whole drug trafficking?

Firstly, Turkey was a traditional and legal opium producer. A large portion of the opium produced was licensed and controlled for use in the pharmaceutical industry. However, alongside legal production, there was also illegal cultivation in hard-to-control rural areas, and some legal production was leaking into the black

⁶¹ *The French Connection*, IMDb, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067116/>.

⁶² *The French Connection*, "Awards for *The French Connection*," IMDb, accessed July 27, 2025, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067116/awards/>.

market. This situation led U.S. officials to claim that Turkey's controls were insufficient.⁶³

Secondly, the prominence of the French Connection drug route and its portrayal in popular culture brought Turkey to the forefront more than other potential sources, such as the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia or Iran. It was easier for the public and politicians to point to Turkey as the source of the problem.

Lastly, Turkey was an essential NATO ally during the Cold War; therefore, it depended heavily on American support, especially military and financial aid. This situation gave the U.S. the power in this asymmetrical relationship. Americans knew that they could push their demands because Turkey was the weaker member of the alliance. It was much harder to exert this kind of pressure on other potential source countries, especially those with communist regimes or having lesser American influence.

As a result, the U.S. government decided Turkey was one of the first targets⁶⁴ to combat drug trafficking from Europe to America. This decision would ease pressure from their own public, show a concrete win in the War on Drugs, and strengthen Nixon's law-and-order image. Turkey's opium production and leakage, the French Connection link, and its dependence on the U.S. made Turkey as the scapegoat. The U.S. policy then focused on forcing Turkey to completely stop opium production, using every diplomatic and economic tool to achieve that goal.

⁶³ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 120.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 69.

3.4. From Diplomacy to Coercion

Throughout the 1960s, the U.S. was urging Turkey to tighten its control over opium cultivation. They wanted stricter controls, an end to unlicensed farming, and more effective ways to fight smuggling. During this period, Turkey, by becoming a party to the 1961 UN Single Convention, had opened its legal opium production to international oversight and was trying to control cultivation through the Soil Products Office (TMO). However, U.S. officials found these controls insufficient because they claimed that legal production was still leaking into the black market for illicit trade.

With the Nixon administration coming to power and declaring the War on Drugs, the U.S.'s stance changed dramatically. The demand for a complete ban on opium cultivation replaced calls for better control. In the eyes of the U.S., as long as legal cultivation existed in Turkey, it was impossible to prevent it from leaking into the illicit market; thus, the only solution was to eradicate poppy cultivation entirely in Turkey. However, this request was very hard for Turkey to agree to, because poppies were a traditional way for thousands of rural families to make a living, they helped the national economy, and they were a necessary raw material for the pharmaceutical industry. In addition, interfering with an agricultural activity in a sovereign nation's borders was seen as a matter of national honor as journalists wrote later.⁶⁵ But the U.S. did not back down from this demand because American officials wanted to solve the American drug problem, and it kept putting more and more pressure on the Turkish side. In addition, pressure tactics were, namely, these: Diplomatic correspondences⁶⁶, special envoys⁶⁷, congressional lobbying against Turkey⁶⁸, and the threat of aid

⁶⁵ Bob Wiedrich, "Perspective: Turkey's Honor Stained by Opium," *Chicago Tribune*, July 17, 1974, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: U.S. Major Dailies, 18.

⁶⁶ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, *Eski ABD Tarım Bakanı Clifford Hardin Tarafından Sayın Başbakanımıza Gönderilen Mektup Hakkında Yazışma*, Yer bilgisi : 54/1200-8611-25 (Ankara: T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Arşivi, February 14, 1972).

⁶⁷ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 129.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 110.

suspension⁶⁹, in other words, using asymmetrical power over Turkey. Thus, these approaches showed the unequal power dynamics between the two allies. In addition, President Nixon himself was personally following the issue and considered it of great importance.⁷⁰ To emphasize the seriousness and urgency of the demand, special representatives, such as BNDD President John Ingersoll, came directly to Ankara.⁷¹

The U.S. Congress also increased its pressure. Some members of the Senate, such as Walter Mondale and Lester Wolff, delivered harsh speeches criticizing Turkey.⁷² More importantly, bills and amendments by a group led by Lester Wolff proposed to cut and suspend foreign aid to Turkey.⁷³ These threats were a huge deal for Turkey. Moreover, while the opium crisis was going on, the tension in Cyprus was also rising. Thus, Turkey needed American weapons and economic aid more than before, because of the rising tension.

The U.S. media also played a part by always keeping the French Connection story in the news and blaming Turkey for the problem.⁷⁴ This situation not only strengthened the U.S. government's position but also put pressure on the Turkish government.

The Turkish government was getting concerned about these actions because they were in a tough situation. On the one hand, they wanted to protect their national interests and farmers' incomes; on the other hand, they also did not want to ruin the relationship with the U.S completely. However, Turkey had little space to negotiate

⁶⁹ James F. Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo: Drugs, Ethnic Lobbies, and US Domestic Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 13, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv128f9b9.7>.

⁷⁰ Garnett D. Horner, "Nixon Warns of Aid Cut to Drug-Dealer Nations," *Star-News*, document no. CIA-RDP88-01350R000200300040-7.pdf, CIA Reading Room, accessed August 23, 2025, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88-01350R000200300040-7.pdf>.

⁷¹ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 101.

⁷² Macide Başlamışlı, "ABD'nin Türkiye'ye Yönelik Ambargo Kararına İlişkin Haşhaş Sorunu Yerine 1974 Kıbrıs Krizini Ön Plana Çıkarma Girişimi," *Asia Minor Studies*, Cilt: 9 Sayı:1 (2021): 701, <https://doi.org/10.17067/asm.827640>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 112.

because the U.S. had great power over Turkey due to the nature of asymmetric relations between Turkey and the United States of America.

The U.S. government used a variety of arguments to back its demands, but at the core, there was a major public health crisis at home. They argued that hundreds of thousands of Americans were hooked on heroin, which was causing skyrocketing crime rates, tearing families apart, and eroding the fundamental structure of society.⁷⁵

This argument often refers to international drug control agreements like the 1961 Single Convention, which Turkey also signed. According to the U.S., Turkey could not prevent legal production from leaking into illegal trade. Therefore, banning opium cultivation presented as both an act of friendship towards the U.S. and a responsibility to the international community.

3.5. The March 12th Memorandum and Erim's Government

The pressure from the U.S. hit Turkey during the period of significant political instability. After the March 12, 1971, military memorandum, the non-partisan government formed by Nihat Erim faced the difficult task of both restoring order at home and improving relations with the outside world, especially with the U.S. Under these circumstances, the demand for a total ban on opium cultivation became one of the most urgent and sensitive issues confronting the Erim government. "It's possible to describe Erim as much more moderate than Demirel. Erim's acceptance of the decision to ban poppies brought relations with the U.S. back to normal. Erim also announced the ban to the public in an idealistic way."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Murphy and Steele, *The World Heroin Problem*, 3.

⁷⁶ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 199.

On March 12, 1971, the Turkish Armed Forces issued a memorandum, effectively forcing the Adalet Partisi (Justice Party-AP) government under Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel to resign. The reasons were the growing political violence, social unrest, and a parliament that seemed unable to function. President Cevdet Sunay then asked Nihat Erim, who had previously left the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party-CHP), to form a reform government that would be above party politics.⁷⁷

Erim's government was largely made up of technocrats and had the backing of the military. Its main job was to restore constitutional order, prevent anarchy, and make necessary reforms. However, this new government did not have much political legitimacy and did not have much support in parliament. Moreover, the military ruled the country by martial law, and some constitutional rights were limited. During this time of unrest and instability in the country, Erim's government needed help from other countries, especially the United States, regarding politics and economics. The U.S.'s support for Erim's government and optimistic view of the aftermath of the military intervention were necessary for Turkey to get international recognition after a coup and American economic aid.

As soon as Nihat Erim's government took power, the U.S. was still putting pressure on Turkey to make opium illegal. At first, the Turkish side tried to resist by talking about how the ban would affect the economy and society, how it would be hard on farmers, the principle of national sovereignty, and how the pharmaceutical industry needs legal opium production. They suggested other ways to solve the problem, like making control systems stricter and cutting down on the areas where crops can be

⁷⁷ Ahmet Gülen, "Nihat Erim Hükûmetleri'nin Haşhaş Politikası," *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi - CTAD* 30 (Fall 2019): 364-5, https://ctad.hacettepe.edu.tr/15_30/13.pdf.

grown. The U.S., on the other hand, made it clear that they would not accept any solution other than a complete and unconditional ban and threatened to cut off aid.

At this point, the U.S. offered Turkey a package of financial incentives to make the decision easier and less stressful. This agreement included money for farmers who would stop growing opium, projects to help them switch to other crops, and technical assistance to make Turkey's drug enforcement stronger. The U.S. government would pay \$35 million in installments.⁷⁸ This amount is around \$300 million in 2025, and could cover the economic loss of the farmers and strengthen the Turkish drug controls.

After months of intense negotiations, bargaining, and pressure, the Erim government decided to ban the poppy production in Turkey.⁷⁹ On the one hand, they thought of the national interests, the future of their farmers, and their sovereign rights. On the other hand, there was the risk of a complete breakdown in relations with the U.S., the threat of losing military and economic aid, and the country's ongoing political instability. Thus, the decision was a logical move by the Turkish government. In addition, former president and prime minister İsmet İnönü was pleased with Nihat Erim's decision. According to Nihat Erim's memoirs, İsmet İnönü said to Erim when he returned from a trip to Europe:

I saw Piraeus. The Greeks there provided various opportunities to the Americans, and in return, they milked America for money like milking a cow. They receive \$3 million just for the facilities in Piraeus. I was terrified that we would chase the Americans away from Turkey. We threw their soldiers into the sea; we subjected them to all kinds of insults. I was terrified that one day the Americans would say, "You've gone too far, farewell." Nihat found a solution for this; he seized America by the nose (*Amerika'yı burnundan yakaladı*) with his decision to ban poppies... Oh, Nihat, you found this very well. You thought of it very well. Do not give up on it; use it well.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ T.C. Başbakanlık, Kanunlar ve Kararlar Tetkik Dairesi Başkanlığı. *Kararname: Hibe Anlaşması*, Sayı: 7/4502, Yer: 283-44-2, Dosya Ek: 42-1 (Ankara: T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri, 1972).

⁷⁹ Gülen, "Nihat Erim Hükûmetleri'nin Haşhaş Politikası," 367-77, https://ctad.hacettepe.edu.tr/15_30/13.pdf.

⁸⁰ Nihat Erim, *12 Mart Anıları* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2018), 236-7.

The government eventually decided that maintaining ties with the U.S. and keeping its foreign support was more important than the downsides of the ban. Therefore, in June 1971, the Council of Ministers decided to completely ban opium cultivation and production in Turkey, effective from the 1972 harvest season. Thus, the ban was officially declared to the public on June 30, 1971.⁸¹

The government told the Turkish people that the decision was made for humanity, stressing that Turkey had a duty to help stop drug trafficking. They also promised farmers would get compensation and new ways to earn a living, thanks to the agreement with the U.S. The message made it clear how important the decision was and what Turkey's responsibilities were. Even though there was no direct mention of U.S. pressure or threats to cut off aid, the public was aware of the outside factors that led to the decision. Erim described this situation in his speech in Afyon on July 29, 1971:

Half of the opium gum extracted from the opium poppies produced in Turkey was taken by the Turkish Grain Board (TMO), while the other half ended up in the hands of smugglers. These smugglers used it to produce the narcotics that poisoned the world's youth. With the international agreements our country signed years ago, Turkey promised to prevent this smuggling. With those same agreements, Turkey also promised that if it could not prevent smuggling, it would completely eliminate opium production. We have performed a duty appreciated by all of humanity. Now, our government has made a decision. In the upcoming planting season of 1972, opium will no longer be cultivated anywhere in Turkey. With this, we have fulfilled our international commitment. But more than that, we have also fulfilled a duty to humanity that has been met with admiration and appreciation by all. With this, we have proven that Turkey can give up a product that is used as a tool to poison the world's youth, rather than make a few pennies from it.⁸²

Messages sent to the people and international community, especially the U.S., showed that Turkey's commitment to its global duties, the determination to fight illicit

⁸¹ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 166.

⁸² Erim, *12 Mart Anıları*, 237.

drug trafficking, and the importance it placed on working with its ally, the U.S. The decision presented Turkey's sacrifice, and more importantly, a duty.

However, this decision created huge debates in Turkey. Opposition parties, especially the Justice Party and some members of the Republican People's Party, criticized it. They called it against national honor, bowing to U.S. pressure, and a decision that victimized farmers.⁸³ Moreover, this decision fueled the doubts about the legitimacy of the March 12 regime and Erim's government. While the ban seemed to ease tensions between the U.S. and Turkey in the short term, it opened the door to new problems and arguments.

3.6. The Years of Ban

The Nihat Erim government's official ban on growing opium started with the fall planting season in 1972. But the first two years of the ban (1972–1974) were not easy at all, because of the replacement of the crop. The implementation caused a lot of social and economic problems, did not completely stop smuggling, and even led to a smuggling scandal by Senator Kudret Bayhan that made people doubt Turkey's control measures even more.

Small-scale farmer families lost their main source of income with the ban. The \$35 million compensation and aid package promised by the U.S. was not enough to heal these socio-economic problems because of the lack of proper plans. The amounts paid out were too low to cover the actual income losses.⁸⁴

Furthermore, more problems arose due to the alternative crops to replace poppies, such as sugar beets, sunflowers, and legumes. Some of these crops were not

⁸³ Aytunç Altındal, *Haşhaş ve Emperyalizm*, 37-44.

⁸⁴ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 126-7.

well-suited to the region's soil and climate. In addition, there was also not enough infrastructure or organization to sell, store, or price the new goods properly. Farmers also did not know how to grow and sell crops they were not used to. Because of this, there was no long-term economic option that could replace the banned poppies. This situation made the area poorer and made the villagers angry and unhappy. The loss of these farmers quickly became a debatable political issue, which made more people want the ban to be lifted.⁸⁵

The ban did make the French Connection route much less reliable. This route moved opium from Turkey to Marseille, via Syria and Lebanon, and then to the United States. But this did not mean that heroin trafficking stopped completely. Smugglers quickly found new ways to get things and new places to get them.⁸⁶ The Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand) and later the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran) started to fill the gap left by Turkey in the production of heroin.⁸⁷ Some documents showed that the drug dealers already stockpiled opium gum and morphine base.⁸⁸ Moreover, even though it was against the law, it was not clear whether small-scale illegal farming in Turkey completely stopped. People thought that there might be hidden growth in big, hard-to-control areas.

Eventually, making opium illegal in Turkey did not solve America's heroin problem. It became clear that simply accusing one country and focusing solely on cutting off the supply was not going to work, and other solutions were needed to understand why people need illegal drugs. The ban forced drug traffickers worldwide

⁸⁵ Juan de Onis, "Opium Poppy Gone, Turkish Farmers Ask 'Why Has U.S. Done This to Us?'," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/08/09/archives/opium-poppy-gone-turkish-farmers-ask-whv-has-us-done-this-to-us.html>.

⁸⁶ "Dünya Eroin Trafığı: Altın Üçgen" *Meydan Dergisi*, May 28, 1974, 26-7.

⁸⁷ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 135.

⁸⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, *The Effectiveness of Turkish Opium Control*, 3.

to find new routes and sources. Thus, this situation led many to question how seriously effective the ban was and whether Turkey's sacrifice was worth it.

3.6.1. A Scandal: Senator Kudret Bayhan

In 1972, Turkish Senator Arif Kudret Bayhan from Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party-MHP) became the subject of an international scandal when he got arrested for illicit drug smuggling. According to *Cumhuriyet*, the incident happened when Bayhan, a member of the Nationalist Movement Party, went on a trip to France in his Turkish-made Anadol car. While he claimed to be going on a shopping trip for his daughter's wedding, authorities had already found the morphine that he was smuggling.⁸⁹

Upon searching his vehicle, police discovered 146 kilos of morphine base, which was hidden in the car. As a result of the detention, a high-ranking political figure like Bayhan shocked the countries that were fighting against drug trafficking. Moreover, it was not only a diplomatic scandal but also an indication of how deep the problem of drug trafficking in Turkey was. Following his conviction in 1973, Bayhan was imprisoned.⁹⁰ The Turkish government also took action with the Assembly. They voted to revoke his senatorship and acknowledged his crime. The case of Kudret Bayhan was a significant example of how international illegal drug smuggling can reach the highest levels of government, and it was a clear indication of the complexities of the global drug war during this period.⁹¹

⁸⁹ "Senatör Kudret Bayhan Nis'te Tutuklandı: Büyük Baz Morfin Kaçakçılığı," *Cumhuriyet*, March 8, 1972, 1, <https://egazete.cumhuriyet.com.tr/oku/192/1972-03-08/1>.

⁹⁰ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 220.

⁹¹ Erdiñç, *Overdose Türkiye*, 171-4.

3.7. Conclusion

The period was a turning point for Turkey's opium policy. The U.S. put pressure on Turkey because of the internal drug problem and the global war on drugs campaign. American officials and people even labeled Turkey as a scapegoat through popular narratives like the French Connection. This pressure, which used asymmetric power dynamics and the threat of avoiding economic and military aid, worked well in Turkey's unstable political climate after the March 12 military memorandum. Even though it cost a lot of money, time, and political capital, the Nihat Erim government had to stop growing opium.

However, the years the ban was in effect clearly showed that it did not deliver the expected results. Farmers suffered more, and smuggling did not stop entirely, but it shifted its routes, and incidents like the Kudret Bayhan scandal raised serious doubts about Turkey's control systems and the ban itself. This experience was problematic because it raised concerns regarding the sustainability of decisions made under external pressure. Moreover, this period also illustrated the interaction of international policies, domestic politics, and socio-economic conditions, as well as the asymmetric power dynamics between Turkey and the United States. Eventually, these circumstances resulted in the revocation of the ban in 1974 by the Ecevit government.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVOCATION OF THE POPPY BAN

4.1. Introduction

In the middle of the 1970s, changes in Turkey's politics made it possible to rethink this controversial poppy ban. This part will discuss why Turkey lifted the ban on growing poppies in 1974, the U.S. arms embargo that followed, and the long-term effects of this crisis on U.S.-Turkey relations. Changing agricultural policy alone was not enough when the ban was lifted. It showed that politics were changing and that Turkey wanted to show that it was independent and change its place in the world. Thus, this part will focus on the Turkish agency in the asymmetric relations with the United States.

4.2. The Rise of Ecevit

The early 1970s were a turbulent time in Turkey. After a military intervention in March 1971, the country was trying to get back on track with democratic rule. There were some controversial decisions made during this period, like the ban on poppy

cultivation. But then, the first general elections after all this upheaval signaled a major shift in the political landscape. This change was actually a key factor in eventually lifting that poppy ban because left of the center (*Ortanın Solu*) Ecevit and National Viewist (*Millî Görüş*) Erbakan came into power in a coalition.

The general elections held on October 14, 1973, were a turning point in Turkish politics. Bülent Ecevit, leading the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party) had a great success. He was known as *Karaoğlan* (Dark-haired Boy), campaigned with the slogan *Halkçı* Ecevit (Populist Ecevit), and promised "*Toprak işleyenin, su kullananın.*" (Land belongs to those who farm on it, water belongs to those who use it).⁹² His campaign was very effective, and CHP significantly increased its votes, becoming the leading party with 33.3% of the vote and 185 parliamentary seats.⁹³ This success was a huge deal because it changed everything for the CHP. They had been losing power since the 1960s, but now they took it back again.

On the other hand, Süleyman Demirel's Adalet Partisi (Justice Party-AP) lost a lot of ground, got 29.8% of the vote, and 149 seats. Necmettin Erbakan's Millî Selâmet Partisi (National Salvation Party-MSP) had a performance in the elections. They got 11.8% of the votes and 48 seats, which was a big surprise.⁹⁴ These unexpected results made them a key party for the coalitions. After negotiations for a coalition, something quite unexpected happened: A coalition government was formed between the CHP, a center-left party, and the MSP, a right-wing conservative party with an Islamic focus.⁹⁵

On January 26, 1974, the new government, led by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and Deputy Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, got a vote of confidence. At

⁹² Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar: Türkiye'de Siyasi İdeolojiler* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2017), 580.

⁹³ Ibid. 585.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 475.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 584-5.

first, it looked like these two groups were ideologically opposed. However, they came together because they had some ideas in common, such as the opium ban and the Cyprus issue. In addition, both sides were unhappy with the state of politics and the economy. They were also both skeptical of bureaucratic power and foreign interference, and they both used populist messages to strengthen their bases.

The MSP's *Millî Görüş* ideology was against Western influence and being dependent on other countries. MSP's views actually aligned with the CHP's emphasis on national sovereignty and independence. Decisions like the poppy ban, which many felt were imposed by outside pressure, became one of those potential common grounds where these two very different political groups could find agreement.

Bülent Ecevit's success in the 1973 elections was not only due to his charismatic leadership but also to his ability to engage directly with the people through the adoption of nationalist and populist rhetoric. Ecevit promised to tackle the problems that rural communities and low-income city dwellers face, bringing up issues like social justice and land reform. Ecevit was a charismatic leader who enjoyed great popularity. He seemed like a leader who understood and cared about everyday people's problems. He cared about the average person and could not ignore how the ban on poppies hurt farmers. In addition, Ecevit's message was about the importance of the national stance and sovereignty. He often emphasized that Turkey should make its own decisions and not allow outside pressure to influence them.⁹⁶

Therefore, the poppy ban became symbolic. Many people saw the poppy ban as a direct American influence on Turkey's internal affairs and a violation of national sovereignty. The perception that the Nihat Erim government, which brought in the ban in 1971, was technocratic and open to outside influence only strengthened this view.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 472-3.

Ecevit, acting as a voice for this widespread belief, presented the possibility of lifting the ban as a clear sign of Turkey's right to determine its own future.

During this period, it is crucial to acknowledge the impact of public sentiment regarding the prohibition of political activities. Farmers in provinces such as Afyon, Uşak, Kütahya, and Denizli experienced financial difficulties due to the imposed ban.⁹⁷ This situation resulted in disappointment in the region and extensive political discontent. Moreover, the voting patterns in these regions emerged as a crucial indicator for political parties.

The call to revoke the ban originated not only from the impacted farmers but also garnered support from nationalist and leftist factions. Nationalists perceived the prohibition as an infringement on Turkey's sovereignty, whereas leftists regarded it as a consequence of imperialist coercion. As a result, promising to lift the ban had the potential to gain broad support from the Turkish nation for the Ecevit government.

With the CHP-MSP coalition now in place, both the CHP's populist, pro-sovereignty message and the MSP's nationalistic, anti-foreign influence stance created the perfect political environment to re-evaluate the poppy ban.

4.3. The Lifting of the Poppy Ban

Shortly after the CHP-MSP coalition government took over, the issue of banning poppy cultivation came back to the forefront of the agenda. The Ecevit government seemed very determined to deal with this sensitive issue, as they had promised to do during the election and as part of their political platform.

⁹⁷ Kyle T. Evered, "'Poppies are Democracy!' A Critical Geopolitics of Opium Eradication and Reintroduction in Turkey," *Geographical Review* 101, no. 3 (2011): 307-8, accessed August 16, 2025. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41303636>.

Then, the Turkish government officially lifted the poppy ban on July 1, 1974.⁹⁸ This decision was more than just a minor change, but it had a great impact on the course of Turkey's contemporary political climate. In addition, there were a lot of reasons behind this choice, including political promises and public pressure.

Lifting the poppy ban was not due to just one simple reason; it was a decision that occurred from a mixture of interconnected factors. First and foremost, it was a bold statement about Turkey's independence and right to make its own decisions. The Ecevit government saw the ban as the American involvement in Turkey's affairs and reversed it. This decision aligned with Ecevit's leftist populist and nationalist stance and the MSP's *Millî Görüş* ideology, showing the world that Turkey was an independent player in the world. Thus, it was a mark that Turkey had an agency in its asymmetric relation with the U.S.

Secondly, it was about populism. In my opinion, Ecevit probably wanted to solidify his populist image and keep his promises to the rural voters, especially those farmers who had suffered from the ban.⁹⁹ Lifting it would ease their financial loss and prove the government cared about its people, boosting the CHP's popularity and helping the MSP to satisfy their conservative Anatolian farmer base, because populists think more about internal politics than foreign relations.

Then there were the economic realities. Poppy farming had been a significant source of income for Turkey, not just for farmers but also for the country through the legal production and export of medicinal alkaloids. Lifting the ban aimed to revive this income, but with a crucial difference: it would not be uncontrolled. The primary objective was establishing a stringent, government-regulated framework via the

⁹⁸ Karar Sayısı: 7/8522, "Kararnameler: 1974-1975 Döeniminde Yedi İlde Haşhaş Ekimine İzin Verilmesi Hakkında Karar," *T.C. Resmî Gazete*, Sayı: 14932, July 1, 1974, https://resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/14932_1.pdf.

⁹⁹ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 151; 200.

Turkish Grain Board (TMO). This organization was not about permitting chaos, but it was about ensuring that poppies were cultivated exclusively for medical and scientific purposes, with the government as the sole purchaser. In addition, scoring the opium poppy was banned, and the TMO bought the whole poppy.¹⁰⁰ This arrangement was a strategic initiative aimed at providing financial assistance to farmers and enhancing the national economy, and alleviating global concerns regarding illegal drug trafficking.

Because of these reasons, the Ecevit government was able to move forward with lifting the ban. This decision had a lot of support at home, even though it caused a lot of concerns around the world, especially in the U.S., because Lester Wolff and Charles Rangel claimed that Turkey's lifting of the opium ban meant that 250,000 more Americans developed heroin addiction.¹⁰¹

The decision of the government to lift the poppy cultivation ban was announced to the public on July 1, 1974. The timing of this move was striking. The fact that it happened about six months after the government took office shows it was clearly a top priority. But it was even more noteworthy that this decision came just a few weeks before the coup in Cyprus, led by Nikos Sampson on July 15, 1974, and Turkey's Cyprus Peace Operation was on July 20, 1974.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 139-41.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 136-7.

¹⁰² Alperen Özkan, "Organizational Response to Recurring Foreign Policy Crises: The Case of Turkish Military Intervention in Cyprus," *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi, (İSMUS)* III, no. 2 (2018): 22, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/1501879>.

4.4. The Arms Embargo

Turkey's decision to repeal the poppy cultivation ban was disappointing for the United States.¹⁰³ The American government had worked hard to get that ban put in place, seeing it as a major victory in the fight against drugs. While critical statements¹⁰⁴ started coming out of Washington right after the decision, the harsh reaction only truly took shape a few weeks later, when the Cyprus crisis exploded. The poppy decision, combined with Turkey's military operation in Cyprus, effectively set the stage for the U.S. Congress to impose an arms embargo on Turkey.¹⁰⁵

The justification of the U.S. decision to put an arms embargo on Turkey was the use of American weapons in the military operations in Cyprus.¹⁰⁶ According to U.S. law, countries that get military aid from the U.S. can only use these weapons for defensive purposes and under certain defensive conditions.¹⁰⁷ Greek-American lobbying efforts in Congress, which pushed Turkey's involvement in Cyprus, were seen as a violation of this law and led to more calls for an embargo.¹⁰⁸

Still, the Cyprus issue and legal reasons alone are not enough to fully explain why the U.S. enacted the embargo. The lifting of the ban on growing poppies led to imposing the embargo much more easily, and it also hurt the relations. The people and the Congress saw Turkey's decision about the poppies as a betrayal. For example, according to Çağrı Erhan's book, a journalist wrote that,

The criticism of Turkey in American newspapers was so severe that a columnist for a best-selling newspaper claimed that Turkey had declared war

¹⁰³ Christian Tyler, "U.S. Calls Back Its Envoy in Turkish Opium Dispute," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1974, 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/07/06/archives/us-calls-back-its-envoy-in-turkish-opium-dispute.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ 32. Gün "ABD Ambargosunun Perde Arkası | 1975 | 32. Gün Arşivi", YouTube video, 6:33, September 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBxAuB6UJbE>.

¹⁰⁶ Mahmut Durmaz, "The U.S. Arms Embargo of 1975-1978 and Its Effects on the Development of the Turkish Defense Industry," (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 22, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36736081.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 22

¹⁰⁸ Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo*, 22, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv128fpb9.8>.

on the United States and suggested that if Turkey did not burn all the poppy fields within six days, American B-52 planes would bomb those fields with napalm. Thus, Turkey's actions were seen as going against U.S. goals and interests. Members of Congress criticized Turkey for not cooperating with them on the drug problem.¹⁰⁹

At this point, there was a divide between the American administration, President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and the Congress.¹¹⁰ The Ford administration understood Turkey's crucial strategic importance on NATO's southeastern flank and was concerned about the damage an embargo would do to their relationship and the NATO alliance. Thus, President Ford vetoed¹¹¹ the decision of the Congress.¹¹² In addition, Kissinger wanted a more flexible strategy.¹¹³ In my opinion, he thought that embargoing a NATO ally would be a problematic action for the U.S. because Turkey was an important front line against the Soviet Union. Moreover, the House of Representatives still took a stronger stand for the embargo. This situation occurred due to the Greek community's strong advocacy, discussions surrounding human rights, and the negative effects of Turkey's opium policy.¹¹⁴ As a result, all aid cancelled on February 5, 1975.¹¹⁵ But, Prime Minister Ecevit says in his interview that the embargo was related to the revocation of the opium ban rather than the Cyprus Operation. He said:

Many people think that in 1974, the USA decided to embargo Turkey because of the Cyprus Peace Operation. However, it is not the truth; I have not been able to explain it for years. We decided to revoke the poppy ban at the

¹⁰⁹ Erhan, *Beyaz Savaş*, 145.

¹¹⁰ Spain, "The United States, Turkey and the Poppy," 304.

¹¹¹ Murat Karagöz, "'US Arms Embargo Against Turkey - After 30 Years: An Institutional Approach towards US Policy Making'," *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs* 9, no. 4 (January 2004): 114, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/perception/issue/49005/625168>.

¹¹² Gerald R. Ford "To the House of Representatives," *Office of the White House Press Secretary*, (Washington, DC: White House Press Releases, October 14, 1974), https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/sites/default/files/pdf_documents/library/document/0248/whpr19741014-009.pdf.

¹¹³ Başlamışlı, ABD'nin Türkiye'ye Yönelik Ambargo Kararına İlişkin Haşhaş Sorunu Yerine 1974 Kıbrıs Krizini Ön Plana Çıkarma Girişimi," 699.

¹¹⁴ Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo*, 17-47.

¹¹⁵ Spain, "The United States, Turkey and the Poppy," 304.

beginning of July, and it was published in the official gazette on July 1st... Just a few days later, that is, before the coup in Cyprus and before our peace operation, the U.S. Senate passed a decision to impose an embargo on Turkey. The Cyprus issue was later added to this decision.¹¹⁶

Thus, the poppy decision played a big part in the embargo process. The official reason for the embargo was that Turkey used American weapons in the Cyprus Operation, but lifting the poppy ban was also a very important background factor, as Ecevit said. In addition to Ecevit's interview, according to Melih Esenbel's correspondence dated May 18, 1974, Wolff declared the U.S. should cut off the aid to Turkey because of the opium issue. Esenbel wrote in his telegraph,

U.S. Congressman Lester Wolff, a representative from New York, took the floor in Congress to urge President Nixon to act to prevent Turkey from lifting its ban on opium poppy cultivation... Mr. Wolff also entered into the Congressional Record an editorial published in a newspaper called "Daily Journal" from a town in New Jersey. The editorial, titled "Crop of Death - If poppy cultivation begins, Congress should cut off aid to Turkey," focused on the opium crop...¹¹⁷

Lester Wolff's thoughts were not new. The sanction threat was already in the air, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan expressed it. According to Moynihan's memorandum dated September 18, 1969, he offers sanctions to France and Turkey. "What is needed is a major diplomatic initiative, accompanied by economic inducements, and if need be, sanctions designed to get Turkey and France out of the drug business."¹¹⁸

Thus, these evidences show the embargo option was already in American politicians' minds before Turkey's Cyprus Operation. Congressional support for the embargo increased, while the administration's efforts decreased. Consequently, the prospect of sanctioning Turkey became more feasible. Concerns about Turkey's

¹¹⁶ 32. Gün, "ABD Ambargosunun Perde Arkası | 1975 | 32. Gün Arşivi," YouTube video, 6:33, September 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBxAuB6UJbE>.

¹¹⁷ Melih Esenbel, "Açık Telgraf," *T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı Arşiv ve Uluslararası Dairesi Başkanlığı*, Document no. DK_C_G0009556_1_5, Yer Bilgisi: 1375-9556-2, (Ankara: T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri, May 18, 1974,) declassified on April 21, 2025.

¹¹⁸ Moynihan, "143. Memorandum from the Assistant to the President (Moynihan) to Attorney General Mitchell," <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/d143>.

reliability as an ally intensified with the opium issue, which caused the Congress to express its discontent. In addition, according to Nihat Erim, Ecevit revoked the ban for his political advancement. He wrote this in his diary on July 17, 1974:

For the last 15 days, even newspapers were writing that a coup would be staged against Makarios in Cyprus. Finally, on July 15, the coup took place. Of course, our government was aware of this. However, when it happened, it became clear that there was no preparation, no plan. The government, boasting that it was pursuing a "dignified policy," lifted the ban on poppy cultivation on July 1, 1974, with a swaggering attitude against America. It was also said that they did not inform America beforehand. They said, "We were not going to ask for permission from anyone." The Prime Minister and ministers themselves were telling lies about the poppy issue... The Prime Minister was about to fly to Afyon, the center of the poppy region, on the morning of July 14, when he was informed at the airport that a coup had taken place. But so that the stage prepared by the CHP organization in Afyon would not go to waste, he flew to Afyon. There, he participated in demonstrations organized by CHP members who came from Ankara. They shouted, "Down with America." The Prime Minister said, "Be careful, a little softer." "Down with those who banned poppy, long live those who allowed it" were also said.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, the U.S. arms embargo on Turkey was extensive, significantly affecting the Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (Turkish Armed Forces-TSK) by prohibiting new weapon sales, spare parts, ammunition, military training programs, and financial assistance. The TSK's dependence on American equipment diminished their operational readiness; for example, numerous aircraft and tanks became inoperative due to a shortage of parts, undermining Turkey's deterrent and combat effectiveness.¹²⁰ It also slowed down modernization projects of the Turkish Army, which hurt Turkey's military position in the region. This issue also helped Turkey accelerate the development of its own defense industry. As a result, the government established state-owned companies like ASELSAN, HAVELSAN, and TUSAŞ after the embargo.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Nihat Erim, *Günlükler 1925-1979* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2021), 1108-9.

¹²⁰ Durmaz, "The U.S. Arms Embargo of 1975-1978," 44.

¹²¹ Ibid. 50-1.

However, this was a long and expensive process. The embargo exemplified the U.S.'s ability to use its influence to penalize an ally. In addition, the U.S. specifically targeted Turkey's military in reaction to the poppy decision and the intervention in Cyprus. This embargo resulted in disappointment and distrust in Turkey. Thus, this decision eroded the perception of a fair alliance and reinforced the belief that the U.S. could overlook Turkey's national interests.

The American embargo outraged Turkey. The government and the people both thought it was unfair, too much, and against the spirit of allies.¹²² The Turkish claim was that the Cyprus Operation was a defensive move to protect Turkish Cypriots and stop Greece from annexing the island, based on international agreements, in addition, that the embargo would make NATO's southern flank weaker and hurt efforts to defend themselves together.

As a result of the embargo, the relationship between Turkey and the U.S. reached one of its lowest points in history during this time.¹²³ During this time, there were accusations against each other, deep mistrust, and disappointment.¹²⁴ Hence, Turkish foreign policy took a big turn when the U.S. enacted the embargo. It made it clear how dangerous it is to depend too much on the senior partner, which led Turkey to act more independently in international relations.

¹²² Başlamışlı, ABD'nin Türkiye'ye Yönelik Ambargo Kararına İlişkin Haşhaş Sorunu Yerine 1974 Kıbrıs Krizini Ön Plana Çıkarma Girişimi," 701.

¹²³ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 158.

¹²⁴ Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo*, 135.

4.5. Aftermath of the Crisis

Due to Cold War concerns, the U.S. lifted the arms embargo on Turkey in 1978. As a response to the embargo, Turkey suspended the American installations. Ecevit's interview exemplifies the Turkish agency as the junior partner.

They are, most of them, closed or rather their functions suspended for some years, and there is no legal basis, at the moment, to reactivate them. A new legal basis would have to be negotiated with the United States, and if the embargo is not lifted, obviously, that cannot be done.¹²⁵

Thus, the policies of Turkey and the U.S. were weakening NATO's southern flank on the Soviet border, and U.S. leaders feared the embargo would push Turkey away from the Western alliance. The embargo had also failed to achieve its intended goal of resolving the Cyprus issue. In addition, Turkey's successful implementation of a controlled poppy cultivation system¹²⁶ like the TMO model, had effectively reassured U.S. concerns about illegal drug trafficking and eventually removed a major point of disagreement that had increased earlier diplomatic tensions.

Lifting the embargo was a long and challenging process. Both Ford and Carter¹²⁷ administrations in the United States tried to convince the Congress to revoke it. During this period, there were expectations for Turkey to take action regarding the Cyprus issue or, at least, show a willingness to engage in negotiations. Also, over time, the U.S. began to more clearly recognize the effectiveness of Turkey's TMO control system and its success in stopping illegal poppy trafficking.¹²⁸ In addition, "Lester Wolff attended the 32nd UN General Assembly as an American member in October 1977. In his speech there, he congratulated Turkey for continuing its strict control over

¹²⁵ BBC News Türkçe, "Bülent Ecevit 1978'te Türkiye'nin ABD ambargosuna tepkisini anlatıyor," YouTube video, 13:33, accessed August 3, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DPwRfiu_m8.

¹²⁶ Ahmet Coşkun Tekin and Sabit Dokuyan, "Haşhaş Sorunu ve Türk Diplomasisindeki Yeri," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 260 (September-October 2022): 68-71.

¹²⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, "Carter Supports Arms for Turks In Policy Review," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1977, 47, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/04/20/archives/carter-supports-arms-for-turks-in-policy-review.html>.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 69-70.

poppy cultivation.”¹²⁹ Thus, the control system also had an impact on lifting the embargo. Turkey's continued strategic importance to NATO and the ongoing fear of a Soviet threat also increased pressure to lift the embargo.¹³⁰

Eventually, following extensive negotiations and diplomatic efforts, the U.S. Congress resolved to terminate the embargo in September 1978.¹³¹ Nevertheless, lifting it did not imply that relations would automatically return to normal. The embargo period produced a profound loss of trust on the Turkish side. The notion emerged that the U.S. might undertake actions damaging Turkey's essential interests due to its internal politics or the influence of other nations.

Furthermore, the TMO model helped Turkey take strong steps to stop illegal opium production within its borders. Thus, Turkish control had a great impact on the illegal drug trade. In addition, the TMO controlled the production system. This system helped farmers to make money and reassured the international community's concerns about illicit drug trafficking.

The TMO system worked well. Farmers had to get special licenses from the TMO to grow poppies in certain areas that the ministry had approved. The TMO was still the only place farmers could sell all of their poppy capsules at a set price. One important rule was to stop the traditional scoring of the capsules, which keeps raw opium from being turned into heroin. The newly founded Alkaloid Factory in Afyonkarahisar processed all of the collected capsules into legal medical products in 1981.¹³² Security forces closely monitored every step, from planting to delivery.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 70.

¹³⁰ Goode, *The Turkish Arms Embargo*, 114.

¹³¹ Okumuş, *Türk-Amerikan İlişkilerinde Haşhaş Ekimi Krizi*, 158.

¹³² Toprak Mahsulleri Ofisi Genel Müdürlüğü, *Haşhaş Raporu 2019*, (Ankara, Turkey: TMO Genel Müdürlüğü, 2020), 9, <https://www.tmo.gov.tr/Upload/Document/hashassektrraporu.pdf>.

At first, countries like the U.S. were unsure about Turkey's system, but the TMO model worked. It mostly stopped the flow of illegal opium and heroin from Turkey. Because of this, Turkey maintained the status of one of the world's legal producers of poppy and alkaloids. Groups like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) praised the country for this.¹³³ Turkey became a model country for balancing farming needs with global duties. This success showed that the decision to plant poppies was not just political but a useful plan.

4.5.1. The Effect on Illicit Drug Trade

With these measures, Turkish opium turned into heroin in Europe, and the trade largely dried out. However, even if Turkey got its own production under control, its geographic position made Turkey a key crossroad for drugs moving from places like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, which is called the Golden Crescent, into Europe. This success in managing its own opium probably cemented Turkey's new role as more of a transit point than where the drugs actually came from.¹³⁴

This situation became clear from the 1980s onward with the rise of the Balkan Route, a major drug highway stretching from Afghanistan, through Iran, then Turkey, and across the Balkan countries into Europe. While the TMO system was good at controlling what was grown inside Turkey, it was not related to the drug trafficking in Turkey. Thus, Turkey needed more border security and international cooperation. In addition, as Turkish controls strengthened, smugglers started to find alternative routes.¹³⁵

¹³³ Tekin and Okuyan, "*Haşhaş Sorunu ve Türk Diplomasisindeki Yeri*," 71-2.

¹³⁴ Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, 233-36

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 241.

As a result, while the TMO model successfully put a stop to illegal opium production in Turkey, it could not fix the whole global drug problem on its own. Turkey became a role model for controlling production, but then faced new challenges as a transit country. In the end, lifting the poppy ban and setting up the TMO system did not shift the drug routes, as it redefined Turkey's place in the global drug trade, changing it from a source country to mainly a transit country.

4.6 Conclusion

Lifting the poppy ban in 1974 was a huge decision for Turkey. It was one of the country's most significant policy changes in that decade. This move was not just about farming but also a diplomatic decision. It showed the new government's goals. Under Bülent Ecevit, they wanted to protect national sovereignty and put people first with their populist policies. The revocation move, with the economic, political, and social factors and the TMO's plan to control production, showed that Turkey could find its solution and gave the country a diplomatic space to move.

But this move came at a high price. The choice to lift the ban, especially linking to the Cyprus Operation, disappointed the U.S. politicians and led to an arms embargo. This embargo hurt Turkey's military, its relationship with the U.S., and made Turkey rethink its foreign policy. It was a hard lesson that showed how dangerous it is to depend too much on other countries and how important it is to have its defense industry. Thus, this situation showed the Turks their power in asymmetric relations during the Cold War.

Even though there were issues, the TMO's control model, which worked well, was a big success for Turkey. It stopped the production of illegal opium and made Turkey a producer of legal medical alkaloids. But as the illicit opium decreased in

Turkey, it became a transit route for the new illicit drug routes. As a drug transit point, Turkey's problem differs from that of a producer of illegal substances to a transit country. To sum up, the decision of revocation in 1974 and what happened after it changed Turkey for a long time.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the Opium Crisis between Turkey and the United States through the lens of asymmetric alliance relationships and foreign policy analysis in a historical perspective. It aims to reveal the complex dynamics between the two allies and how this crisis can be understood within broader theoretical frameworks by analyzing the crisis's origins, development, actors' strategies, and outcomes. In this conclusion, I will first synthesize the research's core findings, then discuss the validity of the thesis's main argument, evaluate the study's potential contributions to academic literature, and finally present its limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.1. Synthesis of Key Findings

My research's structure is around specific questions, such as: What was the role of the asymmetric alliance structure between Turkey and the U.S. in the emergence and management of the crisis? What really were the motivations of Turkish and American actors, what were their strategies, and what challenges did they face?

How did the crisis's resolution and its aftermath shed light on the future of their bilateral relationship?

The answers to these questions showed that the crisis was not a single-dimensional event, but it was an outcome of multifaceted and complex dynamics. The main dynamics of the crisis were these: Structural asymmetry and perception differences, domestic politics and leadership factors, negotiation and resistance strategies, and outcomes of the crisis.

First of all, the structural asymmetry between Turkey and the United States was at the center of the crisis. It was related to the imbalances in military, economic, and political power. This asymmetric power dynamic often led to the alliance being like a patron-client relationship. However, Turkey's growing regional power and desire for strategic autonomy in this alliance made this view more complicated. The U.S. had its global interests, and Turkey focused on its national and regional priorities; thus, these two countries often saw issues through different lenses, especially during the opium crisis. This situation deepened the differences in diplomacy and resulted in a conflict of interest. While the U.S. expected Turkey to take certain actions based on alliance obligations and its global strategy, Turkey prioritized protecting its national sovereignty, security, and room for diplomatic maneuver.

Secondly, the interior affairs and the individual strategies of leaders in both countries, such as Nixon, Erim, and Ecevit, influenced the escalation and management of the opium crisis. For instance, on the one hand, pressure from interest groups such as Greek Americans in Congress has influenced decisions in the United States based on their specific interests. On the other hand, in Turkey, public sentiment, upcoming elections, and the government's quest for legitimacy were some of the factors. When leaders personalized the crisis and implemented populist policies, the crisis became

more complicated and more challenging to solve. Thus, these policies eventually narrowed the paths to diplomatic solutions.

Thirdly, the Turkish agency was another important aspect of this crisis, because it was not a passive actor, despite the asymmetric relationship between the two countries. Turkey used various resistance and negotiation strategies alongside the efforts to keep diplomatic channels open. These strategies included public diplomacy, signaling a willingness to seek alternative partners, and developing legal arguments. On the contrary, the U.S. often used more coercive methods, such as economic sanctions, political pressure, and threats of diplomatic isolation, even bombing. However, Turkey's resistance usually limited the effectiveness of these more forceful approaches as the weaker partner in this asymmetric alliance.

Lastly, the opium crisis did not follow a straightforward path; instead, it showed a fluctuating course with periods of escalation and decrease. Mutual steps taken by both sides, misunderstandings, and conflicts of interest influenced the crisis's progression. The temporary and permanent resolution of the crisis typically involved both sides taking partial steps back and finding a consensus. However, it is obvious that the underlying issues were not fully resolved, which eroded trust in the bilateral relationship. Eventually, the crisis caused the re-evaluation of the alliance's nature and limitations.

5.2. Thesis's Main Arguments and Findings

This thesis argued that viewing the Opium Crisis between the U.S. and Turkey through the lens of an asymmetric alliance. This approach gives important analytical advantages in order to interpret the crisis. The findings that I mentioned above support the asymmetric alliance argument.

First of all, the asymmetrical alliance framework provides significant advantages for analysis. Viewing the crisis as a conflict of interest or a diplomatic disagreement between two sovereign states would be a reason for missing the bigger picture. This framework helps to understand how the imbalance of power shapes the expectations, strategies, and negotiation space of these two states. It explained why the U.S. used certain pressure tactics, taking advantage of its position as a senior partner, and why Turkey used a dual strategy of both cooperation and resistance, trying to stay flexible as the junior partner. While the institutional framework and normative expectations provided by the alliance were factors that prevented the crisis from spiraling out of control, at the same time, asymmetry brought about a tendency to interpret this framework in favor of the United States.

Secondly, the U.S. policies on Turkey during the poppy crisis can also be a subject of academic debates on hegemony and imperialism. The U.S.'s actions like using unilateral demands, sanctions, and interference in an ally's sovereignty can be seen as hegemonic or imperialist. However, this case is unique because Turkey resisted its senior partner. This situation demonstrates that U.S. hegemony is not absolute. The resistance and bargaining power of its allies can define the limits. In addition, the crisis illustrates the tension between the U.S.'s efforts to maintain its global dominance and its allies' demands for autonomy. It proves that the U.S. does not shape the global order without facing negotiation and resistance. Besides these, the existing Turkish agency also shows Turkish power of negotiation, rather than simply accepting the demands. Thus, the opium crisis is related to the asymmetry of power rather than an imperialistic action.

Furthermore, the thesis challenges determinist and reductionist approaches to imperialism and hegemony debates by using the concept of asymmetry in foreign

relations. Despite the limitations, Turkey showed a significant agency during the crisis such as Turkish diplomatic maneuvers, its ability to mobilize domestic public opinion, and its potential to take counter-measures that would increase costs for the U.S. Thus, this diplomatic resistance indicates that Turkey was not a passive but an effective regional actor with the capacity to defend its own national interests and sovereignty. The crisis revealed that Turkey could create a negotiation space within an asymmetrical relationship, using it to at least partially balance or delay American demands.

Analyzing the Opium Crisis between the U.S. and Turkey is most effective through the framework of the asymmetrical alliance concept. The power imbalance shaped the strategies of both nations, with the U.S. using its dominant power and Turkey resisting to protect its autonomy. In addition, this crisis showed that the U.S. hegemony is not absolute, as Turkey's diplomatic resistance and bargaining power showed it was an active participant rather than a passive one. Thus, the concept of asymmetric relations offers a deeper understanding of American actions, while the concept of imperialism does not provide an accurate interpretation. Lastly, this case ultimately indicated that the global order is a contested space, and subject to negotiation and pushback even within alliances.

5.3. Contributions and Implications

This study offers several contributions to the literature on the history of Turkish-American relations and the broader fields of foreign policy analysis and international relations theory. The thesis provides a theoretical analysis of crisis dynamics in Turkish-American relations, which relies on different concrete evidence from archives. Moreover, it focuses on the Opium Crisis along with the framework of

asymmetric alliance theory. Scholars used the concept of asymmetric alliance to interpret Turkish-American relations rather than the theories of imperialism. It emphasizes the need to examine the structural nature of the alliance and its impact on actor behavior, rather than major strategic rhetoric or isolated events. The work also contributes to foreign policy analysis by demonstrating the complex interaction between structural factors such as alliance asymmetry and the international system. Beyond these, it also indicates the actor-centric factors like leadership, domestic politics, perceptions, and strategic choices in foreign policy decision-making. Thus, it presents a case study on how the weaker actors use their agencies in asymmetric relationships, exploring the negotiation practices they use and the constraints they face.

This case study provides several key insights: Firstly, it shows that the asymmetric relationships in foreign relations do not necessarily lead to conflict between participants, but they always have the potential for a crisis. The main tension in these kinds of alliances was the balance between the senior partner's tendency to impose its demands and the junior one's quest for autonomy. Effective management of these kinds of alliances requires that the powerful partner should consider the legitimate concerns of the weaker party; in turn, the junior one should act responsibly for the alliance's overall interests. Secondly, the crisis also demonstrates the limited effectiveness of international pressure, like economic sanctions, which can actually strengthen domestic resistance. This situation affirms that although national sovereignty is not absolute in a globalized world, the instinct to protect it remains a fundamental driver of foreign policy. Thirdly, the study further emphasizes the critical importance of keeping diplomatic channels open and pursuing creative negotiation methods. Eventually, crisis management is a complex process that involves more than

just the use of power; it also requires managing perceptions, building trust, and making mutual compromises. Thus, in light of this information, the opium crisis case is better interpreted through the asymmetric alliance approach rather than the framework of imperialism because Turkish agency and resistance to American will showed a clear image that Turkey was not a colonial nation but a junior partner of an alliance during the Cold War.

5.4. Limitations and Further Research

Like any other academic study, this thesis has some limitations. It is important to know about these limits in order to understand the results and plan future research. First, because of the nature of the crisis, it was not possible to get to all of the vital information. This situation includes information about secret negotiations, private diplomatic letters, and internal evaluations that show what decision-makers really wanted to do. It may have been hard to get into primary sources for a closed-door event; therefore, this situation could have made the analysis less in-depth. For this reason, the study used events and evidence from publicly available archives, official statements, expert opinions, legislative debates, hearings, and media analysis. Secondly, the thesis primarily discusses the political and diplomatic sides of the crisis. There was a brief discussion of other aspects. Some of these dimensions are the effects on trade, investment, and financial markets, changes in public opinion, and the roles of third-party actors like other states and international organizations. It would have been helpful to look more closely at how the crisis affected different bureaucratic institutions in both countries, such as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Intelligence, as well as internal conflicts. Lastly, like other theoretical frameworks, the asymmetric alliance framework has some blind spots that make it hard to fully

understand the crisis. Other theoretical perspectives, like realism, liberalism, or constructivism, could have been used in a historical approach to focus on different parts of the crisis, and could give different reasons for it.

Moreover, there can be some suggestions based on the limitations of this study. Comparing this crisis with others in Turkey-U.S. relations, such as the post-Cyprus embargo or the March 1st crisis. Comparing it with similar crises in other asymmetric alliances, for instance, U.S.-France, U.S.-Japan, Russia-Warsaw Pact countries, and the People's Republic of China's relations with its junior partners would also be beneficial. Even though there is a lot of literature on this subject, more research would give a clearer picture of the power dynamics between states. These subjects would help to test the generalizability of the findings and to understand the similarities and differences of various contexts. Moreover, future research could include a more detailed analysis of the direct and indirect economic effects of the crisis on Turkey. These subjects could consist of farmers' income, the impact of social structure in Turkey, and long-term economic consequences through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Public opinion and media analysis can be different further research areas. The shifting perceptions of the Turkish and American public during the crisis could be studied using surveys and discourse analysis. This research could also investigate how the media showed the crisis and influenced both public opinion and policymakers. In addition, in-depth archival research and oral accounts can be helpful. More archival sources could be used to conduct a more detailed analysis of the crisis, if relevant archival documents, especially diplomatic correspondence, become accessible in the future, and the French archives and the French perspective of the Opium Crisis can be another interesting topic. Additionally, this thesis did not consider the oral accounts of

the actors but the archival documents. Therefore, research based on the oral history interviews with the participants of the crisis period could provide valuable insights into the decision-making processes.



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