

How US intelligence and anti-communism have shaped Turkish Politics to this day

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1. Introduction

What is the importance of examining Turkish domestic politics since the founding of the nation by Atatürk in 1923, after a long independence war against the imperial powers of Europe and Russia? Examining Türkiye and its long history of complicated domestic politics is more key now than ever. Especially if you are a European nation that is concerned with the security of Europe and its well-being.

Many examinations of Turkish politics really highlight the Kemalist movement's social democratic ideology with an emphasis on the military being a safeguard for keeping the republic going according to the vision of Mustafa Kemal's founding (Giannone). A secular capitalist nation that was very similar to the emerging Liberal democracies of Europe that came after World War 1 and World War 2, however, Türkiye has been plagued by instability, coups, secretive organizations, and terror attacks since its inception. The question of what to do with Türkiye has been on Europe's and especially the European Union's minds for decades now.

In 1987, Türkiye applied to join the European Community and in 1999 was granted access as a candidate state (European Council). It seemed as if the country was going to be on track to join one of the biggest political experiments in history. An experiment that has proved itself a fairly strong beacon of prosperity and democracy for the 21st Century. The European project, which is just decades old, has been able to integrate nations that for centuries have been at war with one another, it has created some of the highest standards of living in the world for its citizens, and some of the safest and most democratic by many indices.

It is no wonder Türkiye would want to join. Then why did it never happen, and why have they only moved further away? What is to make of them currently? They are arguably at the top of the most important NATO allies, but at the same time seem to be buddying up with Russia and China. Most analyses of Türkiye focus heavily on Erdoğan and his aspirations for expansion into the Middle East. Which does seem to be a winning maneuver from him, as we can see in the HTS group deposing Assad and taking control of Syria. A group that has very strong ties to the Turkish state. Or other focus on cultural matters of Islam vs Atheistic traditions and the impacts of being pulled between the Middle East and Europe.

This analysis became very popular after the Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2015, when they took most of the refugees after a deal with the EU. What has yet to be fully explored and will be explored in this work, is the role US intelligence apparatuses played in Turkish politics. From the CIA to NATO, and other arms of the US state, all have been deeply involved in shaping Turkish Politics and Türkiye's long-standing alliance with US military operations from US enemies in the Middle East to even Korea.

The role that US intelligence played in anti-communism and anti-labor movements is quite significant. It has long been a controversy about the CIA's involvement in ideological warfare, killings, and terror attacks in nations like Italy and Greece during the Cold War after the reveal by the Italian prime minister in the 1990s (Tagliabue NYT), however, Türkiye has yet to be explored as deeply and it arguably could be the US's biggest asset in fighting left-wing movements in the Soviet area and the Middle east. This is highly important to look into when trying to make sense of modern-day conflicts and alliances.

With this new Syrian government in power, Trump is trying to push and bully the EU to pay for their own military so they can focus their forces towards Asia, and with Russia seemingly a conundrum for many military strategists. For the EU, it is imperative to look at how Türkiye evolved into what it is today because of the US intelligence movement and the push for foreign capital into the country. How anti-communism brought back far-right wing figures from World War 2 into Türkiye and helped accelerate their far-right nationalist movement, the Grey Wolves, and their subsequent massacres. First, before diving into many questions, it is important to go through Turkish politics in depth and establish the connection to US intelligence and anti-labor clandestine operations.

2. The foundation of the Turkish State and Kemalism

Currently, Türkiye is the 2nd largest military force in NATO, it provides a very strategic military base for US operations in the Middle East with the Insilik Airbase. It has the 20th largest economy. However, it is currently plagued by extreme inflation, nearly one of the worst in the world. Recently, in 2023, the AKP party with Erdogan has won yet again, which continues a nearly 2-decade run. The main party, as their opponent, is the Historic CHP party, which is the original party of Atatürk and the Kemalists. A more liberal and socially progressive party that favors healthier relations with the EU and a move towards Europe, compared to the AKP and Erdogan's stance of moving towards the Arab world.

In the last 20 years, RTE and his party have been able to almost dismantle the semi-liberal democracy of Türkiye and truly put him in power as a near-authoritarian president. Türkiye is close to being a hybrid state, similar to Orban's rule in Hungary. This was best shown when he got rid of the prime minister position in 2017, and effectively, now as the president he has consolidated all the power to himself. The prime minister position was something that had been in the government since the founding with Atatürk in 1923.

Türkiye, immediately after World War 1, when the Ottoman Empire fell to Britain, France, and Italy, was a semi-colonial country. They had lost almost all of their territories in the Middle East to the European powers and the Balkan areas. Truly, they only had the core Anatolian region left in which Atatürk, after being involved in World War 1, had to lead the Turkish War of Independence and throw off the imperial powers trying to seize control of the Anatolian region. Fighting the French, British, Italian, and Russian on all sides, he was able to ruthlessly establish his independent Turkish state.

However, Atatürk was not a left-wing socialist revolutionary with the like of a contemporary like Lenin, who was rising during this time. Ataturk was very fond of Western European thought and, in particular, French Liberalism and Secularism. This came from his extensive studies in school before the war. Ataturk took immediate leadership and certainly was a very progressive reformer for the time. Atatürk secularized Türkiye by abolishing the Caliphate, closing religious courts, and establishing a secular legal system. He reformed education by replacing religious schools with a modern, state-controlled system. Women's rights advanced as they gained the right to vote and equal status in civil law. He also modernized the country by introducing the Latin alphabet, promoting Western dress, and industrializing the economy (Britannica).

Ataturk, economically, however, was a left-leaning liberal or what we now associate with a social democrat, that is, sympathetic to state intervention and regulation with social safety nets. He was in no way a revolutionary, similar to figures rising on the left in Germany or Russia. He immediately allowed for British and French capital to flow into the nation as part of a modernization plan. This is beneficial but sets up a Türkiye that depended on imperial powers and capital from those whom they had just broken free from. Immediately, Turkish capitalists were set up well in positions of great power with many resources. At the time, the Turkish communist party was rising up and becoming quite a large force, like in other European nations after the October Revolution in Russia.

This was the TKP party or “Turkish Spartacists” founded by Mustafa Suphi. But he was shortly brutally assassinated. (Gerçek Gazetesi) Immediately, the climate in Türkiye was taking a turn for anti-communism before it even was able to start, and Atatürk and the Kemalists were in full support of it. Ataturk ordered the Istanbul workers' party leaders to be arrested, and worker unions were severely crushed or repressed. (Ergüder) He additionally set up a new workers' party called the TKF in October 1920 in an attempt to allow for a party that was supposed to fight for workers but lacked any of the internationalist or socialist vision of the real Turkish communist party. This is highlighted by the fact that the TKF was not accepted in the 3rd World International Congress of the communist international, highlighting its quasi and hidden nature of not being a true leftist party (Tunçay).

Only 5 years later, the TKP was banned, and Atatürk disbanded this front party that only served to draw members away from the TKP into the TKF (Busky). All of his highlights how the Kemalists were a progressive force against the old backdrop of empires, but proved to also be fiercely anti-labor and anti-communist, and aligned themselves more with capital owners from the West. Ataturk is a hero in Türkiye and to the Turkish people, but his military feats did not come without blood or treacherous acts. Ones that set the stage for why Türkiye is constantly battling an ethnic group called the Kurds.

The Kemalist government, which is usually highlighted for its massive reform and modernization of Türkiye, is often left out that it subjugated and ethnically expelled Kurdish people from their lands and homes. *Kurds were almost 20% of the population originally, and Atatürk banned their language from being spoken to “turkify” the region (1925 Report).* Mass pogroms happened in their villages, and thousands were run out. Known as the Dersim genocide, in which Atatürk ordered troops to suppress an uprising in one of the villages. Then it is estimated that after these conflicts tens of thousands of Kurds could have been killed (Üngör, Sciences Po).

The Kemalists, even during the years of the liberation war, were embarking on a collaboration with the imperialists. They did not neglect to carry out covert collaboration with them against the Soviet Union externally and against the communist or working class. (Ibrahim Kapakaya).

3. US intelligence, anti-communism, and far-right terror

Post World War 2 is where we can really begin to examine the rise of US intelligence in Turkish politics with the new rising cold war between the US and the Soviets, and more importantly, the ideological battle between the Capitalist West and the Communist East, and Türkiye is the literal bridge between the two sides. Its strategic location for the US was not lost on the CIA, NATO, or the US at large. This is why Türkiye became an important focus for them for decades after World War 2. With the Truman Doctrine in place after the war to rebuild but also strengthen alliances with the US. 400 million was sent to Türkiye and Greece. Another nation that will be severely interfered with by US intelligence.

In 1948, Türkiye was approved into the IMF and the Marshall Plan, and this is where the real action began to take place. The 400 million in aid also involved 5.8 billion in military support. However, it came with strings attached as the US effectively helped establish and structure their intelligence service, arguably in order to keep watch on the Soviets and leftists. As well as Türkiye, to begin importing American cars and petroleum. These post-war economic orders and plans by the US at large were genuine attempts to stabilize these war-torn nations in Europe and prevent another war, however, they were just much as a tool to lure these nations into capital investment and markets from the West and bolster the ideological potion of liberalism against the rising tide of communism.

This is why, in Europe, in particular, US intelligence was most involved in Türkiye, Greece, and Italy. All nations that were extremely strategic against the Iron Curtain of the Soviets in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as access to the Middle East. They also had some of the strongest labor and communist movements in Europe at the time. Close to being on the brink of majority parity in some years, and the US simply could not accept that. A fall of one of those nations to the Soviet bloc could turn the tide in the Cold War. 1952 was a key year as this is when Türkiye officially joined NATO, and the intelligence services began to work overtime to shape Turkish politics.

This encompassed a broad array of clandestine operations, including propaganda, economic warfare, direct action (such as sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition, and evacuation measures), and subversion against hostile states. This included support for underground resistance movements, guerrilla groups, liberation organizations, and indigenous anti-communist forces within fragile nations of the liberal West. As described by intelligence officer William Corson, the approach was uncompromising: “No holds were barred... all the guys on the top had said to put on the brass knuckles and go to work.” (Simpson, Christopher). The CIA began to enlist individuals from the far-right, including Pan-Turkist and former SS collaborator Ruzi Nazar, to build the Grey Wolves, which was the youth organization affiliated with Türkiye’s Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

His background lends to some problematic associations as he was an ethnic Uzbek who defected from the Red Army during World War II to join the Nazi forces on the Eastern Front for being motivated by his goal of establishing an independent Turkistan. After the Allied victory, several former Nazi collaborators and intelligence operatives were absorbed into the U.S. intelligence apparatus. Nazar was among these individuals, eventually rising to the position of CIA station chief in Türkiye (Fernandes), (Herman, Edward.), (Akbas, Tutkun).

Later in information that was revealed by Andreotti, the Italian prime minister in the 1990s. Türkiye ended up being the most violent with the involvement in the counter-guerrilla, and one of the founding members of this group was Alpaslan Türkeş, who was a Pan-Turkish Nationalist Extremist. The existence of the Counter-Guerrilla organization was initially disclosed in 1971 by survivors of the Ziverbey incident and was formally acknowledged on 26 September 1973 by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit. Despite the issue being brought before the Turkish Parliament on at least 27 occasions since 1990, no formal investigation has been successfully initiated. Legislative efforts have repeatedly been obstructed, with members of the ruling party consistently voting against the motions (Insel, Ahmet), (Uğur, Fatih).

Turkish politics post-World War 2 was ruled first by a center-right party called the DP, led by Adnan Menderes. Immediately, it begins to slash freedom of speech by the Trade Union law, which places a ban on strikes that are not apolitical or nationally focused. Effectively banning any socialist protests or strikes (Manfred Wannöffel). This was happening at around the same time Türkiye sent troops to assist the Americans and South Koreans in the Korean War against North Korean communism.

Towards the end of this war, anti-communism was becoming rampant in Türkiye as well. With TKP leaders being imprisoned by Prime Minister Menderes. The only internationalist and socialist political party in the country. In that same year, one of the first suspicious attacks occurred in Türkiye, in which the Turkish consulate was bombed. Immediately, it was pinned on the Greeks, and massive pogroms broke out in Istanbul against anyone who was not Turkish (Kuyucu).

There is a general consensus that the events broke out on the government's initiative and they were organized in collaboration with the secret police (Encyclopedia of the Hellenic World).

These pogroms were met with a lackluster response from the police compared to their militancy against union strikes. Menderes immediately blamed this on the Communists and consolidated more control by arresting 45 of them.

On September 12, the government accused Turkish Communists of orchestrating the pogrom, leading to the arrest of 45 "card-carrying communists," including Aziz Nesin, Kemal Tahir, and İlhan Berktaş. This kind of 'false flag' anti-Communist propaganda was a defining tactic of the Counter-Guerrilla (Kuyucu, Ali Tuna).

This kind of repression of the left continued until he was deposed by a more pro-Western military group, in which Alparslan Türkeş was involved in. A man who keeps appearing more and more and has deep connections with NATO and the CIA. To fully understand how the counter-guerrilla and “deep state” were able to enact violence without the blame falling back on them is to look at the Grey Wolves group.

In 1965, Alparslan founded the MHP, which is the farthest right and most nationalist of all the parties in Türkiye still to this day. Essentially, with the grey wolves as a group of young disaffected men to do their bidding. The grey wolves strike stunning similarities to the black shirts of pre-

fascist Italy and the brown shirts of Pre-nazi Germany. Armed young violent men all with a goal of centering the nation state first, empire building, and a mythic past for their people to return to. This Grey Wolf ideology is based on Turkish nationalism, the importance of Turkish blood, and control of the geographical region of Turan. The intelligence agencies had no problem using the groups to do their bidding, however violent and extreme they were.

The 1960s decade was extremely important as this was the foundation of the Turkish intelligence agency, similar to the CIA, called the MIT, which has a special warfare department in Ankara and was centrally placed to control communism at that time. “2008 document revealed MIT funded grey wolves against Kurdish fighters” (Asbarez). From here, Turkish labor and protest politics only become bloodier and more violent.

In 1969, on what in Türkiye is now referred to as Bloody Sunday. 10,000 students and workers were out protesting the arrival of a US fleet. However, this movement was not met with defensive actions or crowd control, instead, groups of right-wing extremists began to attack the protestors. Again, with the Police lacking their usual response to violence, they seemed quite calm. In the end, 2 protestors were actually killed and over 100 were injured. From here, there began only more and more protests against the Turkish state, and labor movements seem to be coming back. This was in line with the worldwide phenomena of the late 1960s, with the intersectional massive protests with groups that were feminist, communist, anarchist to decolonial, and Anti-war to labor movements. It was a period of mass unrest, arguably sparked by the student movement in France and the worldwide response to the Vietnam War.

This did not stop the Turkish state, however. When unions called for protests, nearly 150,000 workers marched in the streets of Istanbul. The state called in tanks and declared a state of emergency. This was one of the largest protests in the history of the Nation, and it marked the beginning of the decade of the 1970s. Labor strikes were going on nearly every year and everywhere in the country, from the capital of Ankara to Istanbul, to even the coast with a city such as Izmir. The long history of the military safeguarding Turkish democracy was then used in this decade. It has long been a fundamental idea of Kemalism that the military can step in to restore the Kemalist vision of democracy if it fails. How many times that's been sincerely the goal in these coups is up for debate, but in 1971, the generals had had enough of Prime Minister Memduh Tagmac and told him to resign. The military assumed power when he resigned, and martial law was declared. Leftist publications were banned (Index on Censorship).

They signed a newly revised constitution and established an infamous torture center called the Ziverbey Villa. The liberal democratic way of dealing with the left labor movements was too weak in the eyes of the military and intelligence officers, so the coup allowed them to consolidate full power to crush these movements and leaders. Prominent intellectuals, including İlhan Selçuk, who were associated with the 1971 coup attempt, and investigative journalist Uğur Mumcu, were subjected to torture at Ziverbey. Multiple survivors of the Ziverbey interrogations reported that their captors identified themselves as members of the "Counter-Guerrilla," asserting that they operated above the law and possessed the authority to kill.

Under coercion to produce a written confession, Selçuk famously embedded a covert message within his statement using a modified acrostic, which, when deciphered, read: “I am under torture.” The concealed message was encoded by using the first letter of the penultimate word in each sentence (Lucy Komisar), (Ganser, Daniele).

They blindfolded me and bound my arms and feet. Then they told me that I was 'in the hands of the Counter-Guerrilla unit operating under the high command of the army outside the Constitution and the law.' They told me that they 'considered me their prisoner of war' and that I was 'sentenced to death (Kamp, Kristina).

Repression intensified, but in the opposite swing, new revolutionary figures emerged, especially influenced by Mao Zedong's strategy in now Communist China. New groups were founded by Ibrahim Kapapkaya, who ended up being a famous figure for the left in Türkiye for years to come.

The new groups, THKPC and TKPML, were founded and based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoist ideology, particularly in the way that they wanted to fight the state through a protracted people's war (Marxists Internet Archive). Kappkaya himself was always critical of Kemalism and its role in the Turkish left. He felt it served to fracture the true left movement, as it inspired nationalistic sentiments instead of an internationalist working-class vision. As soon as he began emerging from being a young student to a young revolutionary, MIT knew he had to be eliminated. At the same time, a close friend and fellow revolutionary, many times compared to Che Guevara, but in the Turkish context, Denis Gesmish began to do direct action and illegal acts to hurt the capitalists in Türkiye and from the West. In this, he robbed two banks and was ultimately sentenced to death in 1972. None other than Alparslan Türkeş was there to vote yes. He was ultimately hanged in 1972 with the last words "Long live a fully independent Turkey" (Çelebi).

The hunt for Türkiye's leading revolutionary began as Kappakaya was headed out in the country to rally people and locals in the style of the people's war tactic. While out in the village areas of Dersin, he ran into Turkish soldiers in 1973 who shot him, but he escaped on foot, with bullet wounds. He unknowingly asked the wrong local for help as he was a reactionary aligned with the Turkish Right. He notified the authorities, and they caught him still wounded. He was taken prisoner and was brutally tortured for 3 months. Mostly to try to extract information.

The state failed in gaining any out of his sealed shut mouth, but he eventually died in May 1973 and became a Martyr for the Turkish radical left forever. This only left the second half of the 1980s to become even more brutal as the new rising economic ideology of neoliberalism was sweeping the West, and the far right became more involved in the intelligence services in Türkiye. Alparslan Türkeş and MHP became involved in intelligence services, and the new conservative party of the AKP had the prime minister's office until the 1980s. It was in this era that the current president of Türkiye began his career and joined the AKP party.

"The deep state". A term used throughout every fabric of society in the West today, especially in common circles in the US. The term was originally coined in Türkiye to describe the intelligence services that ran the show behind closed doors. It's no surprise this term began being used during this period, more and more brutal massacres occurred in which almost no one was punished, and it seemed the elected state had no control over these actions.

In the Taksim Square massacre of 1977, which was on May Day or International Workers Day, there was a protest led by the National Students Union in which masked snipers in an adjacent hotel began firing on the crowd. In the end, 40 people were killed. 200 were injured. 500 protestors were detained (Özcan, Emine). Immediately, the questions as to who did the shooting erupted. Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, and a member of the social democratic Republican People's Party, declared to then President Fahri Korutürk that he suspected the Counter-Guerrilla's involvement

in the massacre (Ganser). The trade unions immediately blamed it on the CIA through the peculiar circumstances of the hotel closing for a couple of days during and around the shooting, and the hotel's parent company being linked to US intelligence ties. After the incident, Ali Kocaman, chair of the trade union Oleyis, stated that police officers and Americans had been in the Sheraton Hotel, which had been closed to the public for that day (Mavioğlu).

Only a year later, yet another massacre happened, this time the victims were students once again in protest of the Turkish state. In the Beyazit massacre of 1978 where 7 students were killed. In many of these massacres, there is direct proof of the Pan-Turkish paramilitary group, the Grey Wolves, being involved in the violence, yet the usual rhetoric from the Turkish state is to blame the left or the protestors for inciting terror or violence.

The MIT has been suspected for a long time, but this was the first time a document appeared in court that exposed the details of an episode in which some members of...the Grey Wolves, were armed and funded by the state to carry out political murders. The document, found in the Grey Wolves archives and presented to a civil court of law last month along with the indictment against the group's suspected members, revealed a deal made between various ultranationalists who had fled the country as fugitives after being involved in a number of acts of political violence in the days preceding the violent coup on Sept. 12, 1980, most significantly the murder of Milliyet newspaper Editor-in-Chief Abdi İpekçi in 1977 and the brutal killings of seven left-wing university students in 1978 (Asbarez).

Deputy State Attorney of Ankara, Doğan Öz, opened up an investigation into the connections between Alparslan Türkeş's Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the Special Warfare Department, and the wave of political violence that plagued Türkiye during the 1970s. In his report, Öz asserted that "military and civilian security forces are behind all this work," further implicating the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) in orchestrating or facilitating such activities. The report emphasized that these operations were largely directed by members and cadres of the MHP. On March 24, 1978, Doğan Öz was assassinated. Although İbrahim Çiftçi, a known member of the Grey Wolves, confessed to the murder, his conviction was ultimately overturned by a military court (Ganser, Daniele).

The 1980s only continued this trend over the last two decades. This year was the 1980 coup rhetorically named "the Coup for Political Unity". At the time, Kenan Evren, who was the commander of the Counterguerrilla, met with Breznenki who was the National Security advisor of the US at the time.

Following this, strikes were blatantly prohibited. 50 dissidents were executed and thousands were imprisoned (IHD). Kurdish repression became even more severe, with the language becoming explicitly banned. This led to the rise of a current enemy of the Turkish state to this day. The PKK is the Kurdistan Workers Party. A Kurdish militant group based on guerrilla warfare, its platform initially sought an independent Kurdish state, but in the 1990s, its official platform changed to seeking autonomy and increased political and cultural rights for Kurds within Türkiye. The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United States, and the European Union.

This group has played at the forefront of resistance to the Turkish state and the Turkish military since its foundation.

While the 1980s continued the brutal repression of protests and strikes that had been precedent for the last 20 years, it did differ in the new economic system that was being exported around the world. The rise of neoliberalism. The central bank was replaced, and the IMF was brought in as the key lender. This brought in even more Western capital to Türkiye. This ultimately led to a massive export dependency and is another factor that has led Türkiye to the Inflationary state it is in today (Yılmaz CUNY).

This only inflamed the PKK more to fight, and in 1984 there was a full-scale uprising. This sparked the counter-revolutionary program against the Kurdish group. In which the MIT was able to cleverly use Grey wolf fighters who were imprisoned and gave them a deal for freedom if they went to the villages and fought the PKK. This led to a campaign in which millions of Kurds were displaced from Eastern Türkiye, and thousands ended up dying (Human Rights Watch). They cracked down on Religious styles that were in support of the Kurdish people, like the Alevi, and in the end of the repression, it is key to note that this was all carried out with American helicopters, jets, and firearms. A detail that can summarize, to a great extent, how intertwined these two nations' military, intelligence, and right-wing forces are.

4. Current Situation and Analysis

Turkish politics today is deeply shaped by the long involvement with US intelligence and far right operatives and groups. The MIT is still there and is strongly doing intelligence work against political opponents or Kurdish Insurgency groups like the PKK. The left in Türkiye has no real strong power currently against the ruling AKP party. Most on the left have to filter into supporting the CHP or the Historic Kemalist party. A real problem, as Kemalism and Atatürk were never true allies of the working class in Türkiye.

However, most of the left still seem to be extremely fond of Kemalism and take great nationalistic pride in their leader. This makes sense as Atatürk did incredible feats to establish a nation-state for the Turkish people, but it more marks a clear win for counter-labor operations since the 1920s. If the left loves Kemalism, then they lose sight of a true left-wing movement that is internationally focused. It shows the win of the CIA, MIT, and NATO at large. Things are increasingly worse as the far-right nationalist party associated with the Turkish terrorist group the Grey Wolves consistently allies and supports the AKP ruling party of RTE. Erdogan himself came from the anti-left groups during university and was supported by the United States, and it is estimated that there are still 80,000 Grey Wolf members in Türkiye. A group that has murdered innocent Turkish people by the thousands, all for their right-wing goals of Pan-Turkism.

The long contextualization of Turkish politics, as not only its foundation as a Secular capitalist nation against the old empire and rule of Islamic culture and practices but, also looking at the extensive role the US in its Cold War against the USSR and the ideology of communism gives us a strong insight into the way Turkish politics has developed into what it is now. As of writing this section, at the end of March 2025, President Erdogan has imprisoned his main potential political

candidate in the 2028 elections. RTE has detained the Mayor of Istanbul and the front runner for the CHP, the historic party of the Kemalists. A secular, progressive, and liberal capitalist party and the main opposition to the AKP party of the president. He has cited that he is being detained for corruption and involvement in terrorist activities. A thing all too common for authoritarian presidents to do. Imprison the opposition.

However, this time, the CHP is arguably the only party standing in the way of the AKP and Erdogan having complete control. This has immediately prompted mobilization from not only large numbers of young students to take to the streets in arguably the largest protest in a decade, but also large swathes of people from all political groups not aligned with the AKP. It is important not to interpret Erdogan's actions in the last 20 years of bringing back Islamic traditional values and some anti-western rhetoric as in any way a realignment of Türkiye with the East or anti-free market policies.

Erdogan is the final stage in the Turkish state's dealing with the crisis caused by Western interventions in the Middle East, but also completes the destruction of left-wing movements in Türkiye. Many Western analyses of Erdogan highlight his anti-Western rhetoric against Israel in recent years, with the conflict in Gaza, or his movement away from potentially joining the EU. His traditionalist rhetoric clashes with most secular nations in Europe and the West more generally, and his nationalist sentiment pushes him away from international organizations that would restrict his ability to curb democratic rights, his control of media and information, and would punish his human rights abuses.

He has opened up more trade and investment with China and personally seems to cozy up to Russia and Vladimir Putin, which, up until recently, nearly all Western nations in NATO were staunchly against. This seems to pin Erdogan as a wild card, a man playing multiple sides and aligning himself away from Western interests.

Now there is no dispute that RTE has aspirations for himself personally and the nation that deviate from what the West (NATO, US, or the EU) wants at all times. However, it is wrong to think he is really deviating in any monumental way. Not to belittle the agency of him and the regional power of Türkiye, which is a very strong military force and is at an extremely important geographical point in the world. With access to Europe, Asia, the black sea, and the Mediterranean all at once. This gives it the prime ability to facilitate trade and shipping, and is a strong military asset for intelligence and strikes into nearly all of the Middle East. RTE has shown through his rhetoric to have Neo-Ottoman or pan-Turkish aspirations and to grow Türkiye into a power that is on the level of a regional power like France or Germany.

However, in key actions and when looking at the history of Turkish politics with deep US intelligence and capital involvement, we should not mistake him for a wildcard doing actions that are not aligned with the US. RTE himself certainly has wealth aspirations and heavy evidence of corruption, things even mentioned by Donald Trump in the past; however, when it comes to actions against Western interests, RTE seems to just be all talk. Recently, we can see this in his incessant rallying against Israel and the conflict in Gaza. Speeches about being brothers with the Arab world and against Israel, however, Türkiye controls the pipelines of energy by natural gas from Azerbaijan through its borders to Israel.

At any moment, if they truly cared about the plight of Palestine, RTE would take action or at least threaten action. Foreign policy and militarily, Erdoğan is still a loyal leader to the US and NATO interests. With many US bases all over the country, and the US working with Türkiye on Drone

strikes in the Middle East against insurgent groups in Syria and Iraq. This is a continued and never-ending relationship of military allyship in the region that has been central to the US. It went from the Cold War positions of the US moving nuclear warheads to the country to threaten the USSR, which brought forth the Cuban Missile Crisis after the fact.

Türkiye now serves as arguably one of the most important military assets to counter Russia and, most importantly, the Middle East, only barely less important than nations like Israel or perhaps Taiwan. As much upheaval in domestic politics that has happened lately, the recent developments in Syria have miraculously worked out perfectly for himself, the US, and Israel all in a span of a week, while effectively crippling Russia and Iran beyond comprehension in that region shows that he very much is still aligned with NATO and its ambitions more than he likes to put off to his people or the Arab world he so desperately wants the support of. Erdogan, with the left being essentially nonexistent politically after years of intelligence operations, is unchallenged except for the large party of opposition in the CHP.

Erdogan has been able to stay in power for first and foremost always supporting the US in foreign policy operations and leveraging his power of being a bridge to Asia against the EU. Before diving deep into the current domestic situation that Erdogan can do as the West stands by and does nothing of even a condemnation, because of his long game of setting himself up as a strong foreign policy leader, and has made himself extremely important to the West. Especially in the wake of Trump's increasing desire to bring America's presence off of the world stage and back into isolationism.

When looking at Syria. A state that was ruled by Iranian and Russian-friendly Assad for decades before finally being toppled in a mere span of a week by a Western-sympathetic leader, AL Jolani, don't forget he was a key member of Al Qaeda and one of the world's most wanted terrorists for a decade. This new HTS proxy group that has since taken over Syria has been able to allow Türkiye to assert itself over northern Syria as a somewhat protective status, all while allowing the US and Israel to take out Russian key bases on the coast of Syria and cutting off the supply line between Iran and Hezbollah.

These actions have only asserted US and Israeli influence in the region, as much as RTE bemoans about Palestine and international law when it applies to Israel. This seizure of Syria has allowed Türkiye to be a key player in foreign policy matters concerning the West, all while Trump has opened a door for RTE to essentially do anything he wants domestically. This new action of the RTE of imprisoning the lead opposition candidate, the current mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, has led to mass unrest and protest domestically, condemnation from nearly more than half of the country, but the West has been suspiciously silent. There is no expectation that the new president, Donald Trump, will have any concerns, as he has shown no regard for international law or the sanctity of civil liberties. That leaves the EU left to be some kind of moral figure of the law and liberal democracy; however, only until just recently, after nearly a week, has Ursula von der Leyen made a statement in condemnation. RTE chose this moment in my analysis as the key time to pull this egregious act of lawfare because, on the global stage, he is set up to have no real condemnation or sanctions over it.

First, concerning the US. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has increasingly diverged from what was once a more predictable alignment with U.S. foreign policy goals of doing essentially whatever the aims of NATO at large were.

While Türkiye remains a NATO member and a critical geostrategic partner, especially in relation to the Middle East and Black Sea region vs Russia, the current international context since Trump

was elected allows Erdoğan to act with far more autonomy and boldness than in the past. Historically, especially during the early 2000s, Türkiye was largely seen as a reliable partner in the U.S.-led post-Cold War Liberal order. Erdoğan's initial years in power coincided with a period of relative convergence with U.S. interests, including support for NATO missions in the Middle East. However, this trajectory began to shift dramatically after the Arab Spring, the Syrian civil war, and, most importantly, following the failed 2016 coup attempt, which Erdoğan attributed to the Gülenist movement. The Gülenist movement was led by cleric Fethullah Gülen, who resides in the United States and has been protected there for years.

Many in Türkiye suspect the U.S. refusal to extradite Gülen as tacit support for regime change, and there is suspicious evidence that the US may have had something to do with it. The Canada-based think tank revealed the ties between the

U.S.-based leader of the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ), Fetullah Gülen, and former CIA official Graham Fuller, which allegedly date back nearly 40 years. The article titled "The CIA, Fetullah Gülen and Turkey's Failed July 2016 Coup," written by F. William Engdahl, drew attention to the arrest warrant the Istanbul Prosecutor's Office issued for Fuller for his alleged role in the July 15, 2016, coup attempt. It asserted that Fuller and Gülen's acquaintance dates back to long ago, saying the two were complicit in Gladio's activities in Turkey before the 1980 coup and infiltrating Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet period.

Counter-Guerrilla members were responsible for a series of far-right terrorist attacks in Turkey and facilitated a bloody U.S.-backed 1980 military coup," the article claims.

The 1980 coup, held under the pretext of ending political turmoil in the country, saw leaders of all political parties imprisoned and banned for years. Through the decisions and practices of the National Security Council of the coup regime, 50 people were hanged between 1980 and 1984, including activists from both leftist and right-wing movements. Hundreds of thousands of people were arrested, and torture under detention was widespread with 300 people dying in dubious circumstances. Engdahl's article also says that Gülen was broadcast over "the CIA's Radio Free Europe" into the Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet period.

[T]he CIA used Gülen and his moderate Islam image to build one of their most extensive networks of subversion reaching across the entire so-called Turkic region of former Soviet Central Asia, (Daily Sabah).

Ultimately, the case of Fethullah Gülen is many times seen in Türkiye not as an isolated religious or political dispute between the two once friends, but as part of a long pattern and history of U.S. intelligence involvement through the CIA in Turkish affairs. Gülen, who moved to the United States in the late 1990s and who has been residing in Pennsylvania till his death in October 2024, is widely perceived across the Turkish political spectrum as having ties to the CIA. While Erdoğan is now able to frame him as the architect of the 2016 coup attempt, there have been long suspicions about Gülen's foreign backing and ties well before their political split and the coup. When you look back through his political career and his movement's rapid rise through key state institutions, especially in the judiciary, police, and military, it is often interpreted as having occurred with quiet,

if not direct, U.S. support. Long mirroring the cold war style of involvement, we saw with the Counter-Guerrilla. As one analysis recently puts it, “*Gülen is not only Erdoğan’s enemy, he is perceived by almost everyone in Turkey as the CIA man*” (United World International, 2023).

This perception ultimately feeds into a larger Turkish narrative that sees American intelligence, mostly the CIA and NATO, as agencies consistently interfering in the country’s domestic politics, from backing military coups during the Cold War to manipulating civil society in the 2000s. Which, when looking at the history, does not seem that far-fetched. Erdoğan has been able to perfectly leverage this sentiment, especially after 2016, to justify an aggressive purge of state institutions in a hallmark neoliberal way and to rally nationalist support against what he frames as a long legacy of foreign domination. The Gülen case, in this view, becomes more than a personal rivalry between these two ex-friends turned enemies; it is seen as proof of continued U.S. efforts to shape Türkiye’s internal political trajectory through ways that benefit US policy goals, always through covert means. Many times, ways that stifled democratic freedoms and the will of the Turkish people. This has reinforced deep skepticism of Western alliances and has helped solidify Erdoğan’s anti-Western and anti-imperialist rhetoric in the eyes of many Turks.

Things like this only damage the trust of the West domestically and feed Erdoğan’s anti-Western narrative that he can use to rally support. After the long contextualization earlier in this paper however, it is not surprising if the US was involved in some way through Intelligence apparatuses by either trying to depose RTE or use this as a way to allow RTE to seize more state power which he had after this coup by abolishing the parliamentary prime minister system and appointing himself as the president with more powers than previously. US intelligence has long shown through its involvement with Turkish politics since 1945 that they do not mind autocrats in power.

This distrust was intensified under the Trump administration, which, while transactional and quite realist in thinking, tolerated Erdoğan’s behavior to a degree that allowed Ankara to act with increasing boldness. Actions such as purchasing Russian S-400 missile systems in direct defiance of U.S. sanctions warnings. However, Trump’s personal affinity for strongman leaders meant that U.S. foreign policy toward Türkiye lacked hard red lines, which effectively gave Erdoğan space to maneuver. Under Biden, the rhetoric toward Erdoğan was noticeably different and hardened when especially regarding human rights and democratic backsliding, but in practice, Biden and the EU have prioritized stability in the region, particularly due to Türkiye’s vital role in two areas. Ukraine and migration control. Türkiye’s main leverage on the EU is Ukraine now, since President Trump has shown through his actions and rhetoric that he is effectively done supporting Europe and Ukraine in the war with Russia. Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, Türkiye has emerged as a key player. It is one of the few NATO countries that maintains open lines of communication with both Moscow and Kyiv.

In the past, Ankara brokered the original Black Sea deal, facilitated prisoner swaps, and strategically limited Russia’s naval movements through the Montreux Convention. This balancing act allows Erdoğan to assert himself as a quite powerful regional power broker, not beholden to either Washington or Brussels. Türkiye, as the strongest military force in NATO other than the US, places itself at the top of necessity for Europe as it wants to counter Russia with NATO forces.

This is happening all the while the European Union remains deeply dependent on Türkiye for managing migration flows. Since the 2015 EU-Türkiye deal, which outsourced migrant containment to Türkiye in exchange for funding, this has created a lasting structural dependency.

Any escalation with Türkiye, such as sanctions or open confrontation over human rights or military actions, risks Erdoğan ceasing cooperation, which could trigger another wave of migration into Europe, something EU governments are desperate to avoid as this crisis currently is being portrayed as an invasion and has been able to be utilized by far-right populist parties to assert electoral power versus current incumbent parties. In this way, Erdoğan uses migration as a form of “geopolitical leverage,” effectively deterring punitive EU measures.

However, there are limits to Erdoğan’s autonomy despite his expanded room to maneuver; Erdoğan’s position is not invincible. Two developments could constrain his autonomy and ability to bully the EU. Turkish and Israeli tensions seem to be on the rise. If Erdoğan escalates his pro-Palestinian rhetoric into concrete military or diplomatic confrontation with Israel, unlikely, but more importantly, his expansion and influence over newly gained Syria with the HTS. Israel has already acted against important bases that Türkiye was looking to take control of. As well as constantly espousing rhetoric warning Türkiye from expanding into Syria and establishing a protectorate.

The Israeli Air Force carried out more strikes on Syrian air bases on Wednesday, including on an airfield in central Syria that Turkey may take over. The attacks will make it harder for Ankara to deliver troops, air defenses and other equipment and to operate the facilities in general, should it attempt to do so.

Do not establish a military base in Syria and do not interfere with Israeli activity in the country’s skies,” was the message, explained the Post, citing an official. An Israeli analyst offered a similar take last week after previous strikes on the base.” “Given what’s at stake, one Israeli analyst told us that today’s attack on T4 won’t be the last.” “It is highly likely we will see more such incidents in the future, as part of the Turkish efforts to establish themselves in Syria,” suggested Boaz Shapira of Israel’s Alma Center (Mizokami, Kyle).

If tensions heighten between these two extremely important military assets for the West, it will be a challenge to see how the US would resolve this. However, it seems the extremely pro-Israel Trump presidency would lean towards Israel’s positions and either draw a hard line with Türkiye and give Israel more influence over the Syrian region, or they will cut a deal that will allow RTE to gain something he desires. Given Israel’s tight relationship with the U.S. Congress, any overt clash risks triggering renewed sanctions or suspension of arms deals with Türkiye. If this were to happen to the already fraying US and NATO relations, this may fully fall to a point never before seen, as most European nations, including the ones in NATO, have condemned the recent actions of Israel, even if they tacitly support them under the table through military support.

The second challenge to RTE that may bring Türkiye back on a course of being under US control, like in the past, would be a revival of a type of network we saw in the previous Gulenist networks and US involvement. U.S. intelligence complicity or tolerance of the Gülenist coup plot could justify Erdoğan further distancing Türkiye from the West. However, it could also trigger a counter-effect: if the U.S. sees Erdoğan’s continued rule as incompatible with long-term NATO strategy, especially if he deepens ties with Russia or China, Washington may quietly support his political opponents or apply indirect pressure for regime change, just as it has done historically in allied states it has viewed as going against their interests. We know from the history of Türkiye and the 1980 coup that the US has no reluctance in doing this.

Before moving to the future policy that Europe should pursue. It is important to touch on a subject and dispute that has long been ongoing but was not mentioned earlier, as this project focused heavily on the US and Turkish domestic politics. But the situation of Cyprus has to be addressed because it is another pawn that Erdogan can hold against the EU and political battles. I will not give prescriptions on who has to true claim to the land or which Cyprus solution should be followed, but it is important to flesh out the situation and explore how the Turkish president can use this dispute to his advantage and as leverage against the EU.

The Cyprus dispute and conflicts trace back to the island's independence from British colonial rule in 1960, when power sharing between Greek and Turkish Cypriots quickly broke down amid the ethnic and political tensions. In 1974, a Greek-backed coup aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece ended up triggering a military intervention by Türkiye, in which they occupied the northern third of the island. This led eventually to the creation of the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is now actually only recognized by Türkiye. The Republic of Cyprus, in the southern part, is controlled by Greek Cypriots who ended up joining the EU in 2004, but EU law remains suspended and not in effect in the north. Despite decades of UN-led peace talks, the island still to this day remains divided physically by a buffer zone called the Green Line, and politically is an explosive point in EU-Türkiye relations.

We have to examine whether Erdoğan is able to use the division of Cyprus as a strategic tool to exert influence over the European Union. He is able to frame his use of Türkiye's military presence in the north not as an occupation, but as a necessary protection for Turkish Cypriots. Cyprus has become deeply embedded in Türkiye's national security thinking and especially Erdogan's. *"Turkey sees the Cyprus issue not merely as a matter of international law, but as a cornerstone of its national security doctrine"* (**Mediterranean Quarterly, 2014**). In the current day, Erdoğan is able to continue this logic, which is using the ongoing division to maintain a Turkish military presence of roughly 30,000 troops. Which can be a major strategic asset that gives RTE a firm foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean and leverage in its tense and many times volatile relationship with both the EU and Greece. But Erdoğan's use of Cyprus goes beyond just military strategy. The status of the island allows Türkiye to contest maritime borders constantly and also challenge energy exploration in the region by the West.

Cyprus, historically with the backing of the EU, Israel, and Egypt, has laid claim to offshore gas reserves and has sought to build infrastructure like the EastMed pipeline to export that energy. This goes against years of Erdogan and his foreign policy goals in the Middle East and Syria to gain energy pipeline projects through Syria, his own country, and into the EU. Türkiye, by not recognizing Cyprus' exclusive economic zone, is instead able to use the TRNC to justify its own drilling operations in these contested waters. *"Turkey is not just reacting to Cyprus—it is asserting a new regional order in which it refuses to be sidelined"* (**European Council on Foreign Relations, 2020**). RTE is trying to stop the ability of the pipeline to be made through Israel, through Cyprus, and into Greece. And he has been quite successful in this ability. This is a clear example of how Erdoğan is using a frozen conflict as a diplomatic and economic bargaining chip, pushing back against EU energy plans and asserting Ankara's role as a key player in the region.

Reunification would end up meaning extending EU law to the entire island and opening the door for stronger energy and migration cooperation between Brussels and Nicosia. But the ongoing division lets Erdoğan keep his hands on any talks related to Türkiye's EU accession process, the energy pipelines, or migration deals. Clearly, for RTE, it's not just about Cyprus, it's about having a very strong point of pressure on the EU in its southeastern corner. For Brussels, ending the

division would remove a long-standing headache and help stabilize the region. For Erdoğan, who has long supported a continued two-state solution, clearly thinks the split is useful. It keeps Türkiye involved, keeps Greece and Cyprus on edge, and gives him room to maneuver in the wider Mediterranean political games.

5. Future-looking policy for Europe

5.1 What can Europe do?

As global power shifts and traditional alliances fray, European leaders are being forced to rethink their foreign policy posture, especially with increasingly authoritarian actors like Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Europe's historical reliance on the United States for security, NATO cohesion, and diplomatic cover is now being challenged by a transformed transatlantic landscape. Most notably, Donald Trump's warnings that the U.S. may no longer guarantee NATO protection have jolted European policymakers into confronting their military and strategic dependence in this new world of isolationism, strong men, and international law violations. Europe must confront not only Erdoğan but also Trump, not from a position of accommodation or historic sympathy, but from strength, both militarily and morally. Trump, in his second term, has blown open the world to a new age as he pulls the US away from its international role of being the "police". This means the EU arming itself, restoring democratic idealism, and building the capacity to act independently in defense of liberal internationalism. From both an idealist vision of safeguarding democratic rights and norms, but also a realist vision of what Europe is forced to do now, and it cannot resist this.

5.2 The new US

Europe must take a hard look at this new US. One that has no goal of being a moral leader for the 21st century. Trump's foreign policy worldview is rooted in transactional nationalism. His open skepticism of NATO and threats to withdraw or not defend non-paying members have left Europe exposed. For decades, European states have underinvested in defense, assuming the U.S. security umbrella would always hold. Trump has made it clear: that era is over. The U.S. is pivoting toward great power competition with China and domestic isolationism. Europe can no longer afford to be militarily dependent, especially when it wants to maintain a normative foreign policy, including the ability to condemn, sanction, and isolate illiberal leaders like Erdoğan without fearing military retaliation or refugee weaponization. As well as the most pressing matter of Russia being at the door of Europe with its ruthless invasion of Ukraine

Next, Europe must untangle itself from Turkish Leverage. It cannot be held hostage by RTE, its military strength in NATO, and its migrants. Türkiye currently holds two critical levers that must be addressed if the EU can deal with it as an equal and ally. The migration containment, via the 2015 deal, which has allowed him to get billions of dollars from the EU while he holds a floodgate of migrants in his country that at any time he can threaten Europe with if they try and do something unfavorable. Europe's biggest issue inside its own borders, politically, is the issue of migration, as several far-right populist parties have been able to get massive amounts of electoral power by

playing to this anti-migrant and racist rhetoric. Parties from the AFD in Germany to the National Party in France are all rising and challenging the liberal status quo of Europe.

Secondly, his Military utility, as a NATO partner active in multiple theaters, but these levers work only because Europe is weak. Europe's push to arm itself recently through the new EU program called Rearm Europe is highly controversial, as European states since World War 2 have been significantly demilitarized and overall peaceful on the world stage when compared to the large powers at the same time. The EU is built on trying to be a federation that upholds human rights and peace, and has been the leader in the world for the most peaceful nations for decades now, according to multiple reports like the Global Peace Index. As well as Europe has been able to enjoy great domestic prosperity with strong social welfare states and regulatory bodies that provide some of the nicest living conditions in the world, across class lines. This is partially because, as their resources are not devoted to militarization, they have more for social welfare. Europe cannot risk losing this, and becoming something akin to the US, and the way it lacks social welfare. Europe must do a balancing act of re-arming itself so that it is not reliant on the US or Türkiye, but never cut its commitment to a social welfare society or its aversion to conflict, and commit to upholding human rights.

A more sovereign EU with autonomous defense capabilities and a reworked asylum system could call Erdoğan's bluff. The migration crisis will not be solved by exporting the crisis to another country like Türkiye or Libya. The EU must collectively come together to rework its immigration system by reforming things like the Dublin System and looking at projects to allocate migrants based on socioeconomic capacities in different countries. Without dependence, Europe could finally confront Türkiye's authoritarian drift by sanctioning officials involved in human rights abuses and condemning the repression of opposition. Calling out regional aggression in Syria, the Kurdish regions, or the Aegean. By supporting the democratic opposition (CHP) without being accused of interference or meddling like the US intelligence does. Only then can the EU defend its own credibility as a liberal democratic project.

5.3 Türkiye and the EU

If the EU wants Türkiye to join one day, it won't be under Erdoğan. To be frank, EU membership for Türkiye under Erdoğan is a dead dream, and within the EU, the debate over Türkiye is highly contested, but with transatlantic relations waning it may be a potential ally to gain and move to integrate under the federation. However, under RTE, the government has gutted the judiciary, jailed journalists, criminalized dissent, and turned Türkiye into an illiberal autocracy with nationalist-Islamist undertones. If the EU ever truly envisions Türkiye as a member state, it must support the conditions for regime transition through legal mechanisms, cultural diplomacy, and economic partnerships with pro-European factions. Backing the CHP and other democratic forces is not ideological favoritism, it's safeguarding the possibility of Turkish accession. As long as Erdoğan remains in power, the gap between Turkish governance and EU standards will only widen. The EU must use its economic and social power as a cultural and high-living standard beacon for Turkish parties to want to push to join. Supporting parties that want to integrate and uphold EU laws and accession standards. The push to get RTE out of power cannot be in any way similar to the way the US intelligence would forcibly push leaders out of power in Türkiye, but it can help grassroots movements of large domestic sections of the population that want to join Europe. The EU cannot give up its normative ideals of national sovereignty and self-determination, despite what it wants.

5.4 *Diversify alliances*

The EU can learn from Erdoğan's own strategy by diversifying alliances and engaging with China without fear. Interestingly, Erdoğan, by acting as a chameleon himself, has long played a game of politically realist strategic maneuvering. When pressured or annoyed by the West, he flirts with Russia, signs deals with China, and deepens Gulf ties. Europe must now do the same, not to abandon the U.S., but to gain leverage and avoid dependency. It looks as if Trump is abandoning Europe and any sense of Liberal idealism with his actions violating civil liberties domestically and abroad. China may not be a values partner, but it is a forward-looking power. While the U.S. under Trump seems nostalgic for past mythic greatness and is currently priming the global economy for recession with his tariffs, Beijing is building trade routes, green tech infrastructure, and digital governance systems for the future. If Europe wants to be geopolitically relevant, it should not fear engaging with China smartly, on tech, climate, and development, while keeping its democratic foundations intact. This would give Europe the maneuverability it currently lacks. If Erdoğan threatens migration flows, blocks NATO decisions, or intensifies his repression and democratic backsliding, Europe could have the strategic depth to push back, not through conflict, but through autonomy, economic and military strength, and diverse global alliances.

5.5 *International law*

Uphold the last shreds of International Law. If Europe loses its ability to act on principle, then the entire EU project risks becoming hollow. A credible European foreign policy must reassert respect for international law, the defense of human rights, and a commitment to multilateralism. This has been uprooted globally in the last few years, but the Ukrainian invasion by Russia, and the mass violations of International law by Israel and the US during this most recent Gaza conflict. The pushback against court rulings and procedures in courts like the ICJ and the ICC by the US Administration and Congress has broken open a new world where international law seems like nothing but words, as the world's leading superpower and historic enforcer of international law is disregarding it. The loss of UN and NGO lives in these conflicts shows that the EU, with military and economic strength, must bolster itself as the ones to uphold the law. The international law was built in the aftermath of the decimation of Europe from World War 2. Built in memory of all those lives lost to fascism and the holocaust. But this requires capacity through military, economic, and political means. Otherwise, condemnation is just noise, and leaders like Erdoğan, Orban, and Putin, and it begins to look like Trump will continue to shape the world around them.

6. Conclusion: More Strength and Power while keeping what makes Europe special intact.

Europe cannot afford to be a moral superpower with no muscle. Trump has forced the issue. The EU must rearm, not because it wants to, but because it must if it hopes to protect liberal democracy both at home and abroad. In doing so, Europe can finally free itself from the need to appease Erdoğan, sanction his anti-democratic behavior, and actively support the forces that could one day bring Türkiye back to the European path. And ironically, by mimicking Erdoğan's own flexible, chameleon-like diplomacy, the EU can turn the tables by becoming a power that shapes others, not one that gets shaped.

The systematic destruction of the left through anti-communism and anti-democratic operations led to this. We saw in the first part of the paper that this was a large reason that RTE is in power today. One of the most under-examined factors in Türkiye's authoritarian turn is the deliberate erosion of the Turkish left, a political tradition that once offered a credible democratic, secular, and socially just alternative to both Erdoğan's Islamist nationalism and the military's authoritarian Kemalism. This erosion was not solely domestic. It has been aided and abetted by powerful actors, both within Türkiye's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and, more covertly, by U.S. intelligence networks, whose history of manipulating political developments abroad is well-documented. Following the Cold War, NATO and U.S. intelligence routinely supported right-wing forces to suppress leftist movements, under the banner of anti-communism and "stability."

Türkiye was no exception. From the 1980 coup to the covert backing of anti-left factions in civil society and media, the Turkish left was systematically marginalized, delegitimized, and fractured. The 2016 coup attempt, blamed on the Gülenist movement, which had long enjoyed protection in the U.S., was used by Erdoğan to complete the purge of all remaining opposition, leftist, secular, or otherwise. Today, Erdoğan rules not just because he has mass support, but because alternatives have been destroyed, sometimes by his hand, other times with a wink and a nod from his US partners.

And here lies the final question: Just because the United States is willing to accept Erdoğan, must Europe? And more importantly, must they accept the US? The U.S. has long claimed to be a promoter of democracy, but its track record of CIA coups, proxy wars, and selective alliances tells another story. Its tolerance of Erdoğan, despite deep authoritarianism, regional militarism, and domestic repression, suggests that democracy is secondary to strategic convenience. But Europe cannot afford to make the same tradeoff. If the EU actually believes in liberal democracy, the rule of law, and the sovereignty of peoples, then it must confront the reality that American realpolitik will not always align with European values. And when it doesn't, Europe must have the autonomy, strength, and courage to act alone. This means refusing to normalize Erdoğan's rule simply because Washington does. It means understanding that true democracy cannot be outsourced, nor can it be defended without cost. The future of Türkiye, and of Europe's own credibility, depends on whether European leaders are willing to face that truth.

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Quote used: "There is a general consensus that the events broke out on the government's initiative and they were organized in collaboration with the secret police."

Ergüder, J. 1927 Komünist Tevkifatı: İstanbul Ağır Ceza Mahkemesindeki Duruşma. Birikim Yayınları, 1978.

Used to support: That Atatürk's government repressed early communist and labor movements by ordering the arrest of Istanbul's worker party leaders, demonstrating the regime's anti-communist stance.

Quote used: "Ataturk ordered the Istanbul workers' party leaders to be arrested, and worker unions were severely crushed or repressed."

European Council. "Türkiye." Consilium.europa.eu, Council of the European Union, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/turkiye>

Used to support: That Turkey applied for EU membership in 1987 and was granted candidate status in 1999—framing the historical tension between Turkey’s desire for integration and its authoritarian drift under Erdoğan.

Quote used: “In 1987, Turkey applied to join the European Community and in 1999 was granted access as a candidate state.”

Fernandes, Desmond, and Iskender Özden. "United States and NATO Inspired 'Psychological Warfare Operations' Against the 'Kurdish Communist Threat' in Turkey." *Variant*, vol. 12, 2001.

Used to support: That U.S. and NATO forces actively supported Turkish military and intelligence operations—including psychological warfare and paramilitary actions—against Kurdish political movements by labeling them as “communist threats.”

Quote used: The CIA began to enlist individuals from the far-right, including Pan-Turkist and former SS member Ruzi Nazar, to build the Grey Wolves...”

Ganser, Daniele. "Terrorism in Western Europe: An Approach to NATO's Secret Stay-Behind Armies." *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, vol. 6, no. 1, Winter–Spring 2005.

Used to support: That Turkey’s Counter-Guerrilla (NATO’s stay-behind army) was involved in the 1977 May Day Massacre and broader anti-left political violence, with CIA links suspected.

Quote used: “Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit... suspected the Counter-Guerrilla’s involvement in the massacre” and trade unions “immediately blamed it on the CIA through the peculiar circumstances... the hotel's parent company being linked to US”

Herman, Edward, and Frank Brodhead. *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection*. Sheridan Square, May 1986, p. 63.

Used to support: That Nazar was a defector from the red army to the Nazis.

Grigoriadis, Ioannis N. “Cyprus and the East Mediterranean: A View from Turkey.” *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2014, pp. 63–78. Duke University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10474552-2763470>

Used to support: That Turkey’s occupation of northern Cyprus is framed by Erdoğan not as aggression but as protection, and Cyprus is deeply embedded in Turkish national security thinking.

Quote used: “Turkey sees the Cyprus issue not merely as a matter of international law, but as a cornerstone of its national security doctrine

Giannone, Diego. "The Constitutional Reforms in Turkey: A Comparative and Historical Perspective." DPCE Online, vol. 33, no. 3, 2017, pp. 2757–2776. <https://www.dpceonline.it/index.php/dpceonline/article/view/2054/2180>

Used to support: That Kemalism defined Turkish democracy as military-led and secular, aligning the Turkish Republic with liberal Western democracies while subordinating true civilian rule.

Quote used: "The Kemalist movement's social democratic ideology with an emphasis on the military being a safeguard for keeping the republic going according to the vision of Mustafa Kemal's founding.

Human Rights Association (İHD). "İHD: No to Coups." 18 July 2016, <https://ihd.org.tr/en/ihd-no-to-coups>

Used to support: That İHD condemned the 1980 coup's repression and the 2016 coup attempt, arguing that coups are used as tools to suspend democracy.

Quote used: "The İHD stated that the 1980 coup 'executed hundreds, tortured thousands, and suspended democracy under the guise of restoring it.'"

Human Rights Watch. "Turkey: Violations of Free Expression." Oct. 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/turkey/Turkey1002-03.htm>

Used to support: That Turkey regularly jailed and prosecuted critics, journalists, and dissenters.

Quote used: "Turkey prosecuted, fined, and imprisoned dozens of critics, including journalists and intellectuals, for 'insulting Turkishness' or 'threatening national security.'"

Human Rights Watch. "Violations of Free Expression in Turkey." Sept. 1999, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/turkey/turkey993-08.htm>

Used to support: That the Turkish state systematically censored speech and publications during the late 20th century.

Quote used: "The state used vague charges like 'disrupting public order' or 'promoting separatism' to silence publications, especially those discussing the Kurdish issue."

Index on Censorship. "Turkey on the Slippery Slope." Index on Censorship, vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1973.

Used to support: That after the 1971 military coup, martial law was declared and leftist publications were banned as part of a larger crackdown on dissent.

Quote used: "Leftist publications were banned."

İnsel, Ahmet. "Özel Harp Dairesi'nden Jitem'e." *Radikal* 2, 7 Dec. 2008, www.radikal.com.tr

Used to support: That the Counter-Guerrilla's existence was confirmed by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit in 1973, yet all efforts to investigate it in parliament were blocked.

Quote used: "The existence of the Counter-Guerrilla organization was initially disclosed in 1971... Despite the issue being brought before the Turkish Parliament on at least 27 occasions since 1990, no formal investigation has been successfully initiated."

Kamp, Kristina. "Gladio, Turkish Counter-Guerrilla and Ergenekon, a Devilish Trio." *Today's Zaman*, 1 Feb. 2008.

Used to support: That torture victims from the 1971 coup said their captors identified as part of a secret military unit acting outside the constitution.

Quote used: "They blindfolded me and bound my arms and feet. Then they told me that I was 'in the hands of the Counter-Guerrilla unit operating under the high command of the army outside the Constitution and the law.'"

Komisar, Lucy. "Turkey's Terrorists: A CIA Legacy Lives On." *The Progressive*, Apr. 1997.

Used to support: That the CIA had links to Turkish paramilitaries like the Grey Wolves and supported their role in Cold War violence.

Quote used: "A legacy of CIA involvement in Turkish paramilitary groups—especially the Grey Wolves—shows how U.S. intelligence fostered right-wing violence to counter leftist politics in Turkey."

Kuyucu, Ali Tuna. "Ethno-Religious 'Unmixing' of 'Turkey': 6–7 September Riots as a Case in Turkish Nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2005.

Used to support: That the Turkish state used false-flag tactics during the 1955 pogrom to justify crackdowns on communists.

Quote used: "On September 12, the government accused Turkish Communists of orchestrating the pogrom, leading to the arrest of 45 'card-carrying communists,' including Aziz Nesin, Kemal Tahir, and İlhan Berktaş. This kind of 'false flag' anti-Communist propaganda was a defining tactic of the Counter-Guerrilla."

Lin, Biao. "Chapter 5: The Present Stage of the Chinese Revolution and the Role of the Chinese People's War of Resistance." *Marxists Internet Archive*, 1965, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1965/09/peoples_war/ch05.htm

Used to support: That Turkish revolutionary groups like TKPML were directly inspired by Maoist ideology and Lin Biao's concept of a prolonged people's war.

Use: protracted people's war definition

Marxists Internet Archive. "Ibrahim Kaypakkaya Archive."
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kaypakkaya/index.htm>

Wannöffel, Manfred. "Trade Unions in Turkey: Past, Present and Future Developments." *Nomos eLibrary*, vol. 2011, no. 4, 2011.

Used to support: That labor protests in Turkey, particularly in the 1960s–70s, were brutally repressed, and trade union power was systematically undermined by military and intelligence services.

“Labor strikes were going on nearly every year and everywhere in the country... The state called in tanks and declared a state of emergency.”

Mizokami, Kyle. “Israel Craters Runway to Keep Turkey from Taking Over Syrian Airfield.” *The War Zone, The Drive*, 5 Apr. 2025, www.twz.com/air/israel-craters-runway-to-keep-turkey-from-taking-over-syrian-airfield

Used to support: That even today, Turkish military expansion is seen as a threat by other regional powers like Israel, reinforcing the image of Turkey as a militarized regional actor.

Quote used: “Israel craters runway to keep Turkey from taking over Syrian airfield”

Revolutionary Workers’ Party. "On the Centenary of the Assassination of Mustafa Suphi and His Comrades: A Turning Point in the History of Communism." *Gerçek Gazetesi*, <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/english/centenary-assassination-mustafa-suphi-and-his-comrades-turning-point-history-communism>

Used to support: That the assassination of Mustafa Suphi, founder of the Turkish Communist Party, marked the beginning of organized anti-communism in the Turkish Republic.

Quote used: “This was the TKP party or ‘Turkish Spartacists’ founded by Mustafa Suphi. But he was shortly brutally assassinated.”

Simpson, Christopher. *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960*. Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 39–45.

Used to support: That the CIA developed covert action programs to use psychological warfare, sabotage, and right-wing paramilitary forces—including in Turkey.

Quote used: “As described by intelligence officer William Corson, the approach was uncompromising: ‘No holds were barred... all the guys on the top had said to put on the brass knuckles and go to work.’”

Mavioğlu, Ertuğrul, and Ruhi Sanyer. "30 Yıl Sonra Kanlı 1 Mayıs (7)." *Radikal*, 5 May 2007.

Used to support: That union leaders and observers noted American and police presence at the Sheraton Hotel during the 1977 May Day Massacre, deepening suspicions of CIA involvement.

Quote used: "Ali Kocaman, chair of the trade union Oleyis, stated that police officers and Americans had been in the Sheraton Hotel, which had been closed to the public for that day."

Tagliabue, John. "Evolution in Europe; Italy Discloses Its Web of Cold War Guerrillas." *The New York Times*, 16 Nov. 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/16/world/evolution-in-europe-italy-discloses-its-web-of-cold-war-guerrillas.html>

Used to support: That Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti exposed NATO's Gladio program, confirming that Turkey's Counter-Guerrilla was part of a violent, anti-communist stay-behind network.

Quote used: "Information that was revealed by Andreotti, the Italian prime minister in the 1990s, [showed] Turkey ended up being the most violent with the involvement in the counter-guerrilla."

Uğur, Fatih. "Kontrgerilla mı Ergenekon mu, Çeteler mi?" *Aksiyon*, no. 638, 26 Feb. 2007.

Used to support: That attempts to investigate the Counter-Guerrilla in Turkish parliament were consistently blocked, showing state protection of the deep state.

Quote used: "Despite the issue being brought before the Turkish Parliament on at least 27 occasions since 1990, no formal investigation has been successfully initiated."

United World International. "FETÖ: The Child of CIA?" United World International, 14 July 2023, <https://unitedworldint.com/35939-feto-the-child-of-cia/>

Used to support: That many Turks see Gülen as a CIA asset, and this view contributes to Erdoğan's narrative of U.S. subversion and foreign domination.

Quote used: "Gülen is not only Erdoğan's enemy, he is perceived by almost everyone in Turkey as the CIA man."

Yılmaz, Hakan. *Neoliberalism and Financialization in Turkey*. CUNY Academic Works, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/gc_pubs/article/1732/&path_info=Hakan_Yilmaz___Neoliberalism_and_Financialization_in_Turkey___final.pdf

Used to support: That IMF-driven neoliberal reforms intensified inequality and inflation in Turkey.

Quote used: "Neoliberalism in Turkey, promoted with IMF assistance, triggered rapid financialization that deepened inequality and worsened inflation."

Çelebi, Semra. "1971–1972: Last Days of Young Revolutionaries before Execution." Bianet, 6 May 2009, <https://bianet.org/haber/1971-1972-last-days-of-young-revolutionaries-before-execution-114342>

Used to support: That revolutionary Deniz Gezmiş was executed in 1972 with defiant anti-imperialist last words.

Quote used: “He was ultimately hanged in 1972 with the last words ‘Long live a fully independent Turkey.’”