A EVREN’S PERSPECTIVE TO TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY
IN THE 1980-1989 PERIOD

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The 1980 and later period, especially the 12 September 1980 coup, is undoubtedly one of the most important periods of Turkish political life. The events before and after September 12 constitute a breaking point in Turkish politics. It's possible to feel the dynamics that this creates even today. In particular, politically and socially, it still maintains its freshness in society’s memory. Even today, the effects of the 12 coup and the impact of the coup have been seen in some places in daily life. This is precisely why we need to examine this important period of Turkey and the most important actor of this period, Kenan Universe. The aim of the study is to understand the reflections of this transformation to the present day, especially the impact of Turkey's political life on Turkish foreign policy and, most importantly, the perspective of Ahmet Kenan Evren, one of the sharper revisionists of his age, and to evaluate internal and external politics from his perspective, and to follow a scientific methodology, the studies in the literature were reviewed and written with the intention of reflecting the period from an objective point of view.

Key words: Ahmet Kenan Evren, September 12, 1980 Military Intervention, Foreign Policy, Internal Dynamics, Political Transformations.

Introduction

September 12, 1980 is a date that can be considered as a turning point for Türkiye and Turkish Foreign Policy. It is obvious that Türkiye’s internal problems increased in the period before 1980. As a result of the increase in anarchy and terrorist acts and the absence of management, the military coup of 12 September 1980 occurred, and the security-oriented restructuring of the country was decided to be implemented. It was accepted that the current 1961 Constitution had been insufficient to ensure the security of the country and the work on the new constitution started. Thus, the 1982 Constitution, which is still valid today, was proclaimed.

In the study, the beginning of the 12 September 1980 Military Operation, which is a sharp date for the Republic of Türkiye, and its influence will be explained in details by taking account of the September 12 military operation, Kenan Evren as the main actor of the operation, and the repulsive effects of the pre-1980 period.

Finally, Kenan Evren’s role in the September 12, 1980 coup, his influence on the foreign policy of the period, his voluntarily ending his military life, his official political stance that would last from 1982 to 1989 will be examined in detail, together with his impact on Türkiye and Turkish Foreign Policy and the decisions he made against the events which took place. Although it is difficult, the situations related to the issue will be evaluated through his eyes.

12 SEPTEMBER 1980

The 1970s are among the dusty shelves of history as an extremely dark period for Turkish politics. In particular, the impact of the Cold War all over the world, fights in Türkiye, unsolved murders, street protests, gangs in the neighborhoods, uncompromising attitudes of politicians, the deterioration in the economy and the failure to implement the 1978-1979 stability decisions led to the idea that the army should take over the administration (Balci, 2013). During the process, Chief of General Staff Kenan Evren seized the administration of the Republic of Türkiye on the night of September 12, 1980. The National Security Council, consisting of Nurettin Ersin, Nejat Tümer, Tahsin Şahinkaya and Sedat Celasun, would be responsible for the administration of the country. General Kenan Evren was the chairman of this council. However, Evren would also fulfill his duties as the head of state (Dursun, 2005).
The reason why the coup took place is explained in the National Security Council statement signed by Kenan Evren (Balcı, 2013). According to the statement, administrative powers in Türkiye are dysfunctional, internal and external enemies threaten our country, the conflicts of the politicians are in a vicious circle and Türkiye is all alone under the threat of war. The National Security Council (NSC) dissolves the parliament and the government on the verge of this declaration. He then announces that he has declared martial law to be implemented throughout the country. On September 20, 8 days after the coup, Bulent Ulusu, the former commander of the Naval Forces, took on the task of forming a government (Dursun, 2005). Kenan Evren, on the other hand, started to make trips to the country and started informing the public about the necessity of the coup. In addition, on September 12, 1981, on the anniversary of the coup, he declared that he would convene the Consultative Assembly, whose members were elected by the NSC. This Assembly would ensure the preparation of the 1982 constitution, the last constitution of Türkiye, and would carry out an intense propaganda activity with the supervision of the National Security Council (Dursun, 2005).

'The 1982 Constitution was accepted with a 91.37 percent 'yes' vote in the referendum held on November 7, 1982. There was no separate ballot for the presidential election. Evren had become the 7th President of Türkiye for a period of seven years in accordance with the first provisional article of the new constitution.' (Utku, 2014)

**TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN 1980-1989 PERIOD**

**Türkiye in the Light of Neo-Liberalism**

While ideological discourses were at their peak in the politics of the 1960s and 1970s, with September 12, concepts such as action and reconciliation began to take their place. This was one of the products of neo-liberalism (Balcı, 2013). This new order created by looking at Türkiye’s pre-1980 past, was adopted by the state in order to eliminate the economic difficulties. Neo-liberalism, which says that the primary and most important factor is the economy, enabled Türkiye to develop a versatile policy. The aim of this versatility was not to get rid of loneliness as in previous periods, but to improve economic relations (Yavuzalp, 1998). However, in the second half of the 1980s, Turkish foreign policy turned from an economic basis to a security basis. The PKK terrorist organization, which emerged in 1984, was carrying out terrorist acts especially in regions with Kurdish population and in countries such as Iran, Iraq and Syria. This security policy was also inherited in Türkiye’s 90s (Karpat, 2012).

In short, Türkiye transformed an economic-oriented policy into a security-oriented policy in the new period it entered after September 12. In addition, Türkiye began to evolve into a conservative and liberal political thought during the time of Ozal. These two situations found a new place in Turkish politics (Balcı, 2013). The new trend entering into Turkish politics was blended with the multidimensional policies of the 60s and became a foreign policy tool of the 80s. Especially, economic relations with Middle Eastern countries increased by 20% (Baser, 2000).

The perception of structured neo-liberalism in Türkiye emerges as a situation that advocates adapting to the new formation by soldiers trying to preserve the status quo. At the same time, the military is responsible for the security of the country, and the bureaucracy is responsible for its opening up. This does not make the decision maker the only one (Yavuzalp, 1998). However, with the 1983 election, the static structure of the NSC, which is also mentioned in foreign policy, comes to an end. Together with the 1982 Constitution, policy making passes to the council of ministers and the president. However, in 1983, the same NSC was given a higher representation authority than the political parties. The fact that Kenan Evren became the president also enabled the NSC to become a privileged institution in foreign policy making. (Balci, 2013).

**Relations with the USA**

The month of March in the 1980s was a period in which relations with the United States were reorganized. This rapprochement made itself felt even after the coup, and it appeared as the withdrawal of Türkiye’s previous veto on Greece’s desire to join NATO. Türkiye managed to break the anti-Americanism that started in the 70s after the
military coup. (Balci, 2013). Thus, an open-minded policy was followed and no major difficulties were encountered in developing relations with the United States (Hale, 2003).

In this process, the army tried to develop policies to put relations with the United States back at its center. Türkei is very important for the USA, which could not show a reflex for the Iranian revolution and Afghanistan establishing relations with the USSR. It is because Türkei is seen as a gateway to the Middle East for the USA (Yavuzalp, 1998). This situation led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. This memorandum necessitated the approval of Türkei and NATO for the use of airports. Thus, the movement of the USA in the region was partially limited. (Balci, 2013).

In the second half of the 80’s, the USA had a series of events. The biggest of these was the US Senate's acceptance of the allegation that the Turkish in the Ottoman Empire committed genocide against the Armenian for the so-called Armenian events. Thus, relations began to become tense again. Another issue was that the military struggle of the Turkish Armed Forces in the fight against the PKK was declared as a human rights violation by the USA. (Karpat, 2012) Türkei's Kurdish policy was criticized for the first time in the human rights reports that the USA started to announce in the late 70s. In particular, mentioning the Kurdish as a minority led to an increase in tension. This revealed public statements that the USA wanted to establish a PKK state on Turkish soil (Yavuzalp, 1998).

**Tense Period with Europe**

The torture and political executions that were put into practice with the September 12 coup were seen as a major human rights violation in Europe. However, the same Europe believed that the military intervened in order to increase the effectiveness of democracy in the first phase of the coup. This thought meant all kinds of support for the military by Europe. Thus, they supported Türkei both economically and politically (Balci, 2013). However, as the event reached different dimensions, European states began to react. Despite the agreements made, countries such as Germany and Belgium, where the Turkish are resided, started to apply visas to Türkei (Karpat, 2012).

Two developments in 1981 led to the policy that Europe would follow for Türkei. The first of these was the veto of Greece against Türkei's desire to enter the European Community, and the other was the lobbying activities initiated by those who escaped the coup (Yavuzalp, 1998).

Although Türkei wanted to become a full member of the European Community (EC) under Turgut Ozal's rule, it was clear that there were some obstacles to this. The most important of these obstacles was the approval in 1986 of the membership of Spain and Portugal, which had relatively poor economies (Yavuzalp, 1998). The other obstacle was Greece, which carried out intense propaganda against Türkei. Another obstacle was the implementation of restrictions on free movement, which were not applied to other workers but Turkish workers.

Although Türkei tried to overcome these obstacles, it was also aware that Europe was stalling. The right of individual application on human rights, which was accepted in 1987, showed that Türkei was trying to democratize. Although Türkei withdrew Greece's NATO veto, it was futile to wait for the relations with Greece to improve. The momentum could not be gained in Greek relations, as expected (Karpat, 2012).

In 1987, Ozal began to act more freely when it came to foreign policy. Thus, believing that relations with Greece should be improved, he tried to implement a policy of correction. Although Ozal approached Greece in a friendly way, there was no agreement on the lawlessness committed by Greece. However, at the 1988 Davos summit, bilateral relations succeeded in making progress. The army, on the other hand, thought that Ozal's attitude was too concessive. Because the most important key point in the improvement of relations with Greece was the solution of the Cyprus problem (Balci, 2013).
Relations with Iraq, Syria and Arab Countries in the Fight Against PKK

The Kurds, who have a very large population in Turkiye, were subjected to strict state control in the first years of the Republic. In particular, the Sheikh Said rebellion contributed to the formation of this policy. With the 1980 coup, the dosage of violence against the Kurdish people increased considerably. Many citizens of Kurdish origin were either imprisoned or fled abroad. This situation, on the other hand, benefited the terrorist organization PKK, which introduced itself as the so-called representative of the Kurdish. In addition, the PKK settled in Lebanon with the help of the Palestine Liberation Organization and recruited terrorists, especially from the Kurdish (Karpat, 2012). Because of the war between Iran and Iraq, there occurred a great weakness in the north of Iraq. The PKK, which managed to establish close relations with the Kurdish living here, started to make a name for itself in the region over time (Balci, 2013). Turkiye, on the other hand, was giving harsh reactions to the world against the terrorist organization. The first country to suffer from this was Syria. Turkiye’s declaration that it should do its best for its border and internal security caused many PKK groups to cross from Syria to Iraq (Hale, 2003).

The increase in PKK terrorists in Northern Iraq triggered an increase in attacks on Turkiye. On the other hand, Turkiye carried out an operation against Iraq in 1983 with approximately seven thousand soldiers. The organization, which suffered great losses, cooperated with Barzani. This cooperation caused Turkiye to establish relations with other countries in order to become stronger. The first example of this was the security agreement with Iraq. According to the agreement in question, Turkiye would be able to monitor Iraq up to five kilometers. (Balci, 2013).

In the mid-80s, when the PKK increased its actions against Turkiye, Turkiye began to prioritize border operations. As a result of an action in which twelve soldiers were martyred, Turkiye carried out a heavy air strike and many terror camps were bombed. The Barzani administration, on the other hand, started to get closer to Iran while the PKK were intensifying its actions. Prime Minister Ozal did two things in the face of this situation: the cross-border operation and the security agreement with Syria. According to this agreement, the two states would not help any organization within their borders (Hale, 2003).

The PKK was also involved in the relations between Turkiye and Iran. However, the change of the Iranian regime with the 1979 revolution caused the relations with Turkiye to be limited. However, regime change did not mean much for Turkiye. The indicator of this consisted of the decisions taken by the junta administration in the context of foreign policy. Although it was desired to establish close relations with other Islamic countries, the relationship to be established with Iran would be based on historical and traditional ties (Balci, 2013).

Turkiye followed an active policy of neutrality in the war with Iran and Iraq. Thus, in the economic context, export revenues with Iran were over one billion dollars. Rather than having simple relations with Iran, Turkiye established an active policy with Middle Eastern countries during the military rule, and joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference first at the level of the prime minister and then at the level of the President. In addition, Kenan Evren tried to develop a strict policy with the countries of the region. During his visit to Saudi Arabia in 1984, he said that the two countries needed to sign both a commercial and a military treaty. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, started a new banking activity by integrating the interest-free banking sector into the country. (Baser, 2000).

Relations with Israel were under the guidance of Muslim states. In particular, Israel’s making Jerusalem the capital was strongly opposed. Besides, Evren declared that he did not accept Israel’s annexation of the Golan Heights and that he recognized the Palestinian administration (Baser, 2000).

KENAN EVREN’S APPROACH TO POLICY

Kenan Evren states in his interviews that he is not regretful by any work he has done in his political life except for the speech he gave on the day of the coup. During the visits he made after the coup, he became surprised by the interest and concern shown to him by the people. He was quite pleased with this situation.
Evren, who says that he was in favor of saving Turkey, states that he did not calculate the reaction of any state, especially for the September 12 Coup. The reason for this is that the states in the world thought that Turkey of that period knew very well and saw the coup as legitimate. Communism is the basis of this idea. According to Evren, the western bloc does not want Turkey to become communist. Evren also states that he carried out the coup against communism, which started to spread in Turkey. Even the Arabs supported the September 12 Coup. This is because Arab countries are also against communism. Many Arab countries remarked that they were too late to stage a coup in their own countries. They talked to Kenan Evren about it. Of course, there were also those who opposed in Arab countries. However, these were not governments but parliaments (Bulut, 2011).

Kenan Evren also states that Greece's return to the NATO military wing began during the time of Ecevit and that he was very uncomfortable with Greece's attitude. Kenan Evren says that especially during Demirel's time, international pressure was felt very much and they took the decisions together with the foreign minister.

Evren remarks that he acted fairly against those who said that the right-wing suffered more damage during the coup. However, some of those who had the opportunity to talk to him gave voice to the thought that the left-wing was burdened more. However, Kenan Evren, who opposed the ideas given above, indicated that everybody was equal before justice and he executed both right-wing and left-wing people at the same time in order to establish justice. In addition, Kenan Evren emphasized that a right-wing or left-wing prisoner were not executed without the arrival of another opposing prisoner (Dursun, 2005). In line with all these statements, we should infer that Kenan Evren thinks he has been a rationalist statesman and soldier. However, the understanding of rationalism in Turkey's dynamics does not quite agree with the understanding of Kenan Evren. Likewise, the concept of justice and equality in Evren does not coincide with the concept of justice in Turkey. Despite all this, Ahmet Kenan Evren, with his aggressive military attitude, has changed the dynamism of Turkey and the status quo life through his military revisionist structure.

**Conclusion**

Turkey's post-coup foreign policy instrument consists of two parts. In the first half of the eighties, Turkey follows an economy-oriented foreign policy. However, events in the region, especially the PKK terrorism, forces the rulers of the state to produce a foreign policy centered around security in the second half of the period.

The military junta under the command of Kenan Evren sight support outside to ensure the legitimacy of the coup while making moves to secure itself in internal dynamics coming with September 12. In the post-coup normalization, the economic problems of Turkey are taken into account and policy making is started by considering the economic parameters of this new period.

There has been various changes in foreign policy actors. The softening Cold War climate has revealed the fragment of a non-polar world order. In particular, Turkey's rapprochement with the states that it has stayed away from in accordance with the principle of secularism until now is one of the important indicators of the changing Turkish foreign policy. Of course, the attitude of European countries is effective in the change of this perspective. Turkey has been on almost every platform to get rid of the loneliness policy and the concessions that can be considered generous have also shown themselves. The biggest indicator of this concession is secularism. Another concession is Westernism. Turkey abandons its western-oriented policies and turns its face to the east because Turkey is not able to bear another blow. However, Kenan Evren tried to rebuild relations with the West in his time. The best example of this was Greece's support for NATO membership.

With the post-junta normalization period, the protagonist of the coup, Kenan Evren, has entered politics and served as the President for 7 years. Playing an active role in the state administration, Evren has visited many countries and accomplished to display completely different stances from the stereotypical characteristic structure he left on the people with some of the policies he followed. However, his statesmanship and his behavior in accordance with the dynamics of realpolitik could not completely
get in the way of his military identity. It is because Evren became a president who had come to power with a military coup in the eyes of the people.

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