

The Role of Incirlik Air Base in the US's Iraq Intervention in 2003

ABD'nin 2003 Irak Müdahalesi'nde İncirlik Hava Üssü'nün Rolü

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Abstract: Although there has been approximately bases and American troops in Turkey since the Cold War years, İncirlik Air Base has come to mind when it is talked about American hegemony. The importance of İncirlik has increased in a time with the closure of other bases over the years, and the American power in Turkey has begun to be discussed together with. İncirlik, which constitutes the essence of Turkey-U.S. and Turkey-NATO relations and maintains its importance with arising crises in the Middle East, especially in the Post-Cold War era, has come to a determinant status in bilateral relations. As an example, U.S. wanted to use İncirlik actively during its intervention in Iraq in 2003, and that did not actually become possible with the rejection of licence of March 1st. This has caused the Turkey-U.S. relations to become tense and come to the breakdown point. The demands of the U.S. before the Iraq War and what happened during the war have once again revealed the role and importance of İncirlik in the U.S.-Turkey relations.

Keywords: US-Turkey Relations, İncirlik Air Base, US bases.

Öz: Soğuk Savaş yıllarında Türkiye'de Amerikan üsleri ve askerleri olmasına rağmen, Amerikan etkisi denilince akla ilk olarak İncirlik üssü gelmiştir. Yıllar geçtikçe kapanan üslerle birlikte İncirlik'in önemi her geçen gün artmıştır ve Türkiye'deki Amerika gücü İncirlik ile birlikte ele alınmaya başlanmıştır. Türkiye-ABD ve Türkiye-NATO ilişkilerinin özünü oluşturan ve özellikle Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Ortadoğu'da yaşanan krizlerle önemini koruyan İncirlik, ikili ilişkilerde belirleyici bir konuma gelmiştir. Örnek olarak, Amerika, 2003 tarihli Irak müdahalesi boyunca İncirlik'i aktif olarak kullanmak istemiştir ve 1 Mart tezkeresinin reddedilmesiyle fiilen bu mümkün olmamıştır. Bu Türkiye-ABD ilişkilerinin gerginleşmesine ve kopma noktasına gelmesine neden olmuştur. Irak Savaşı öncesinde ABD'nin istekleri ve savaş süresince yaşananlar ABD-Türkiye ilişkilerinde İncirlik'in rolünü ve önemini bir kez daha ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ABD-Türkiye İlişkileri, İncirlik Hava Üssü, ABD üsleri.

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Introduction

Since it was first established, İncirlik Air Base has affected United States(US)-Turkey relationships and the results of this interaction have differed in all periods. Within historical process, the base has been a close cooperation in some periods, an independence threatening factor or the only remaining link between two countries in some other periods and a means used to regulate the relationships that hit rock bottom in some others, in accordance with the course of relations.

İncirlik is a strategically important base for Turkey and the US. In the first years after its establishment, it was shown as an assurance for economic and military aids that would be provided by the US and it was opened to the US's usage. In the following years, while the base was an important part of close alliance relationships between Turkey and the US, it was used as a trump card against the US when it came to the issues with which Turkey was dissatisfied in its regional politics. The US's use of İncirlik has also brought along some negative circumstances. Indefinite use of the base not only restricts Turkey's freedom of movement but also overshadows the country's independence. Besides, operations and manoeuvres the US carries out using İncirlik have confronted Turkey with the possibility of getting into trouble with neutral countries.

For the US, İncirlik was an important part of the policy of surrounding the Soviets in Cold War period. In the following period, it was the centre of power to immediately intervene in the events that occurred in the Middle East. In most of the operations organized especially after the 9/11 attacks, the İncirlik has been actively used.

In this study, the use of İncirlik especially during the 2003 Iraq War, in which strategical importance of Turkey was preeminent, will be discussed. In the first part, the US's base policy is explained with a theoretical framework on the basis of Cox's hegemony notion. In the second part, a brief analysis of the bases in Turkey is made through the existence of NATO and the US in Turkey and the importance of İncirlik, which is considered to be the most important and most famous one is discussed. In the third part, the negotiations on the Ankara-Washington line during the Iraq War and the reflection of the use of İncirlik on Turkish-American relations will be examined.

The Concept of Base and US Base Policy

It is known that for centuries, states have been willing to protect their own sovereignty territories, to capture the places beyond their borders and to maximize their interests. This long-standing expansionist policy is a way for states to increase their level of welfare and to expand their territory. The bases that emerged for this purpose have assumed the duty of replenishment and have maintained the borders

and trade routes. With the development of maritime trade, the number of colonies; with technology, strategy and with the development of power and competition, the presence of overseas bases have increased.

Military bases are the generic name given to facilities owned or managed by a military unit, where staff are sheltered and where equipment is located. According to Blaker, military bases are campuses routinely used by military forces. (Blaker, 1990, p.4). Harvaky, on the other hand, has made the base and facility distinction on the basis of usage rights in order to prevent ambiguity. In this context, while bases imply that there is no limitation in the access of the utiliser country and that operation rights are free, facility is used to indicate situations where the usage conditions are based on certain conditions and that these conditions are determined by the host country within its sovereignty. (Harvaky, 1989, p.8). He argues that the new concepts that the US tries to use for overseas bases are related to the sharing of authority.(Lutz, 2009, p.8). As it is understood, although there has been no full consensus on the definition of bases, Chalmers Johnson's words referring to the similarity between colonies and military bases "*You would once follow the spread of imperialism by counting colonies. American version of colonies are military bases.*" summarizes the situation from a general perspective (Johnson, 2004). Ultimately, the existence of military bases has been an indicator of imperial desire in every period, has been accepted as expanding sovereignty territory by dominating over a certain region and by having an effect on the political and economic structure of the host country (Lutz, 2009, p.7).

A Theoretical Approach to the US Base Policy

Due to the Realist view that dominated the politics in the Cold War years, explaining the US base policies in terms of power balance, national interest and security has almost been a convention. Realism defines the state as the main actor, and explains that by its very nature the state is in an effort to maximize human interests. At this point, military bases are important elements of military forces of the states trying to provide security in an anarchic structure (Viotti and Kauppi, 1993, p.35-186). With this approach, the US can own land even in remote areas, on the grounds of protecting its national interests.

The colonial races, which were initiated by powerful states in the global sphere especially after, the nineteenth century, the desiring to gain new territories increased the importance of key points in geographic terms. The geopolitical theory emerging at this point argues that the geographical position of a country is the most important factor in creating security policies. This theory, which takes its point of origin from concepts such as national interest, military power advocated

by realist theory; argues that conflicts are natural consequences of the intercountry power struggle.

The ideal of building military bases as a result of the military strategy created by states was not fully explained by the Realist approach in the post-1970s period when the bipolar system began to end. One of the most important names adapting the critical theory, which emerges in this setting, to the theories of international relations is Robert W. Cox.

In Cox's approach, the concept of hegemony used by Antonio Gramsci holds an important place. While hegemony, in general, states a country's pressure and political superiority over another state (Cambridge Dictionary), Cox and Gramsci explain hegemony as "*a situation where ruled section acknowledges authority of their own free will, without a need for use of force*". The hegemony Cox refers to means leadership rather than pressure, with the use of force in the background. Hegemony, which means a strong actor's establishing dominance over relatively less strong actor, provides opportunity to use brute force while being established and it tries to convince and gain consent after it is established. However, according to Cox, unilateralism policy that the United States of America implemented as in Iraq in spite of the opposition of the majority of people separates the principle of consent brought by hegemony from legitimacy (Cox, 1981, p.141).

Forming a military base is based on the idea of gaining territory by owning usage rights of a certain region within another country's borders. In order to define *raison d'être* of bases, Robert Cox's hegemony concept is used. The US has the right to use, in line with principle of consent or by means of war, over another sovereign country's territory. Most of the time, it insists not to withdraw, disregarding the host country's demands. These bases, which are centres and proofs of American expansionism, are expressed as the US's territories overflowing the continent (Bölme, 2012, p.60).

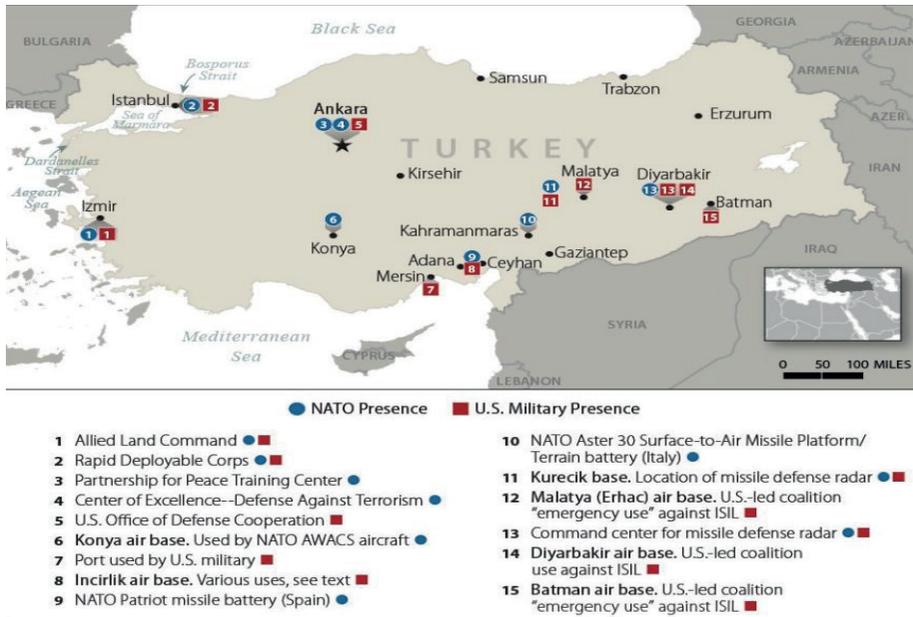
What canalizes the US to the need for establishing bases is that its interests have become global. Bipolar order and communism threat that emerged after the Second World War caused Western countries to give consent to the establishment of bases in their territories by the US. The soldiers, who were charged in these bases, also provided opportunity to the spread of American capitalist economy. The bases have important roles in spreading American values and ideas and in establishing American ideology in the new world order that was established especially in the period following the Cold War. When it is viewed from historical perspective, it is seen that the US attained bases in times of war.

The Presence of NATO and the US in Turkey

Turkey gave consent to the establishment of military bases and facilities by choosing to cooperate with the United States of America in the period following the Second World War in order to destroy Soviet threat and to get rid of loneliness in foreign politics. In this context, as a result of the *Military Facilities Agreement (SOFA)* in 1954, which was formed by referring to the third article of the NATO Treaty, US bases and facilities were established in Turkish land. Operation, logistic support and responsibility, training authority of these bases belong to *Turkey-America Logistic Organization (TUSLOG)* Commandership which is linked to the Pentagon (Tunçkanat, 2007, p.201).

As of 2016, there are totally 15 military bases in 10 different cities in Turkey. Some of these bases are in control of NATO, while some others are directly connected to the United States of America.

Figure 1. NATO's and US's Bases in Turkey



Source: Sputnik News Tr, 2017.

As shown in the map, the presence of NATO and the US in Turkey is seen in six geographical regions, we also encounter at least one foreign military facility in İstanbul, İzmir, Ankara, Adana, Malatya and Diyarbakır. It is striking that there is not any base only in Black Sea Region.

Afyonkarahisar Military Airport, which is the biggest military airport in Turkey, is used as “*the Main Jet Maintenance Base*” by NATO. Tekirdağ Çorlu Airport, Konya Air Base, Gaziantep Airport, Batman Airport include 1 Patriot defense system, while reinforcement support in Sabiha Gökçen is provided. It is claimed that in İzmir Çiğli Air Base, there are I-HAWK and Roland missile systems. Şile base is a range with international standards for launching Stinger missiles. Balıkesir 9th Air Jet Base is also employed as an opened base for similar situations. With the establishment of missile shield radars, which have been mentioned a lot recently and which have been planned to be established in Malatya Kürecik, it is aimed that the gravity of NATO and the US in Turkey is increased. Nevertheless, the most outstanding one among the bases in question and the most important one is undoubtedly İncirlik Base.

Historical Transformation of İncirlik Air Base

The base was realized as a result of changing world politics of the US after the first successful nuclear arm trial of the Soviet Union in 1949. The base, whose construction began in 1951 as a result of diplomatic relations that began with Turkey, started to operate in 1955. According to the US authorities, Turkey is in a position that is quite important to collect military intelligence and it is also an ideal base for military operations. İncirlik was initially planned as a pass base for heavy and middle bomber aircrafts that belong to *American Strategic Air Command (SAC)* and its importance in terms of intervention in crises in the Middle East was not ignored due to what was going on in the Middle East. In addition to the Middle East, the US gave weight to using the airports in Turkey in order to ease the transfers in the Europe and Africa route (Cassaboom and Leiser, 1998, p.73). Similarly, the importance of the bases in Turkey increased due to its position that was suitable to collect intelligence regarding the operations that were conducted by the axis powers in the Balkans. With changes in threat perceptions, İncirlik has been the base that could use tactic nuclear strike ability that has the most advanced technology in the Eastern Mediterranean (Arkin and Fieldhouse, 1985, p.76). In 1950s, when İncirlik Airport was at construction phase, the US Air Forces started from the top on down to search how they could benefit from the base to attain the maximum output. In these periods, İncirlik was given duties such as supporting the US Air Forces in the south of Turkey at peacetimes, Tactic Air Base operations at wartimes and air corps in the Middle East (İncirlik Air Base).

After the Lebanon crisis, İncirlik became a unit where fleets belonging to the US Air Forces conducted rotation trainings. In 1960 F-100 war fleets, in 1964 F-105s and in the 70s F-4 aircrafts in Germany came to İncirlik Base for rotation training. At the same time, it makes the base special that the nuclear weapons, which belong to the US, are placed to İncirlik in a way that NASA considers ap-

appropriate. With Head-Dress Agreement which was signed in 1959 between the United States and Turkey and with *Stockpile Agreement* which went into operation in 1995, keeping nuclear weapons in some bases in Turkey was made possible (İncirlik Air Base).

That İncirlik, Balıkesir and İzmir iđli bases are used as nuclear armed air bases both gives confidence to Turkey and poses danger as they are within the Soviet range. In this sense, İncirlik is regarded as the storage area of nuclear weapons for the United States of America against any threat from the Middle East (Arkin and Fieldhouse, 1985, p.76). The US, which initially tried to guarantee the İncirlik against the threats from the Middle East and the expansion of the Soviet Union, changed its policies due to its changing interests in the Middle East. The US accounts, coming from the past, for the oil in the Middle East created a need to intervene in that region anytime. İncirlik Air Base, from the Gulf War until 2003 It served in the 39th Wing Command. In this process, it hosted Exploration Operations from the North, Peace Operation I and Peace Operation II. A new process for the İncirlik Base began on September 11, 2001 with the attacks to the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The US Air Force sent 50 airplanes to the base for rotation. In this way, İncirlik served as an aircraft, tanker and logistics provider for the Humanitarian Relief Operations in a global war by supporting military operations. One of the first countries to provide large-scale support in the Gulf War, Turkey is considered to have a key position for an operation in Iraq considering the developments after 2001.

Ankara-Washington Contacts Before the 2003 Iraq War

In 1998, during his visit to Ankara, although US Defense Secretary William Cohen indicated that they had no special request from İncirlik, he later implied to the press that they expect full support from Turkey in case of an operation (Milliyet Archive, 1998). Turkey's support for the period in question is considered to be very important. According to *Murat Yetkin*, because of that Turkey could not intervene in Iraq due to 1999 earthquake happened in Turkey and of the possibility of Turkey's not participating in such a war, Iraq operation was postponed (Yetkin, 2004, p.29-30).

As of 2002, after the US resolved to attack Iraq, contacts between the two countries increased. Bülent Ecevit, the Prime Minister of the period, tried to prevent this war as much as he could; yet he did not want to remain outside the war. A common view in the army during this period was the view that the *Turkish Armed Forces* should enter northern Iraq to pursue an active foreign policy on Iraq during the war (Bila, 2003, p.47). Because the officials in Washington were dominated by the view that Turkey will be persuaded, *US Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz*, who did not want to lose time, arrived in Ankara to

discuss the Iraq issue in particular. While Turkey's worries and concerns such as the establishment of a Kurdish state in the region were debated, Wolfowitz stated that the operation would be realized with or without Turkey but Turkey's support in other words providing utilization permit for the bases was important for the US (Hürriyet, 2002).

As a result of the intense reactions from the US, following that the seriousness of the situation was brought to Ankara's notice, the government had to make urgent plans. In 2002, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ugur Ziyal faced with very serious demands of the United States following his going to Washington. In this meeting where the idea of Northern Front was discussed for the first time, the US declared its plan to overthrow Saddam Hussein by entering Iraq via Kuwait at the South and via Turkey at the North and by uniting in Baghdad. Nevertheless, it was declared that Turkey's sensitivities would not be ignored and all the economic needs would be satisfied (Bila, 2003, p.166). After a series of meetings between Turkish officials and American officials, *United States European Command (EUCOM)* delivered these requests in a message sent to the Turkish General Staff for the first time in black and white and orally (Yetkin, 2004: 45). The US requested full support from Turkey to the full extent in the process of Iraq operation and desired cooperation. This meant that utilization permissions had to be provided for the Turkish bases, primarily İncirlik, facilities, airports and civil ports for eighty thousand American military aircrafts and about two hundred and fifty fighter aircrafts (Yetkin, 2004, p.80-81).

A report submitted by the Foreign Affairs to the National Security Council after all these requests, listed the US's expectancies of Turkey (Bila, 2003, p.170-171).

- To be absolutely impartial in the operation, and even to suspend Northern Exploration Operation during the operation.
- To stop Northern Exploration Operation and to permit only over-flights,
- To support the operation only in terms of the determined parameters of the Northern Exploration Operation, in other words not to permit the US operation except for the conditions required by the Northern Exploration Operation,
- To add over-flights to the third option,
- Extended decree and to permit over-flights.
- Extended decree and permitting over-flights and special forces operations,
- In terms of air operation, providing full support and permitting special forces operation,
- Full support both in terms of air and land operations,

- To add Turkey's participation in the land operation to the eighth option,
- Conducting Turkey's own operation along with the US,
- Conducting only Turkey's own national operation in the Northern Iraq.

In the report it is stated that it must not be permitted that American land forces enter into Iraq via Turkey unless there are changes in the conditions to some extent. In whatever direction the decision was, the government had to obtain authority from the Assembly for all options.

Iraq War arrived to the starting phase on 11 October 2002, after the US Congress gave authority to Bush, who was the President of the period, to declare war. Like all the other NATO member states, Turkey was also delivered a message regarding a possible Iraq operation. The message was delivered via *EUCOM* to the General Staff. New requests of the US (Bila, 2003) were listed as:

Deployment of 80.000 American soldiers in Turkey

- 2. Deployment of 250 aircrafts in Turkish airports
- 3. Providing the US with utilization permit regarding the 6 main airports [Batman, İncirlik, Antalya, Sabiha Gökçen, (Diyarbakır, Afyon) and the 8 substitute airports (Muş, Balıkesir, Konya, Van, Erzurum, Erzincan, Çiğli, Malatya)].
- 4. Providing full convenience in the airports (3 main airports, Mersin, İskenderun, Samsun and 2 substitute airports Trabzon, İzmir)
- Free utilization of these airports and all roads, railways and waterways between the airports.
- Allocating areas for the operation training of the American forces that would be deployed in Turkey
- Providing support and security services for the American forces during their transfer to Turkey
- Providing transfer support in moving the American tanks
- Scouting airports, ports and roads where American forces would be transferred and deployed
- Providing every kind of security in the transfer and deployment of the American forces
- Providing fuel support of 4 million gallons to the American forces in the first phase
- Permitting utilization of Turkish territories in Iraq operation.

The US requested overtly the advantages, in addition to others, of unauthori-

zed passing and indefinite utilization that would transform the whole Anatolia into a base. Turkey made remarks stating that these unending requests already went beyond their aim and they would cause loss of reputation for Turkey. However, in the same period, there was a consensus regarding that Turkey would accept these requests in the US. It was thought that whatever political party won the elections in November 2002, Turkey would support this operation (Migdalovitz, 2004, p.6). After Justice and Development Party won the elections in November 2002, *Paul Wolfowitz* and Grossman visited Turkey in December. After the requests were reiterated to the new government, negotiation process began officially between the officials of the two countries. According to the offer Wolfowitz submitted to the government, if Turkey accepted, it would be the auxiliary operation base and the main reinforcement point. *United States Central Command (CENTCOM)* would establish the second biggest main operation base after Qatar in İncirlik.

Licence Crisis and the Use of İncirlik in Iraq War

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government preferred to divide the requests of the US. On 6 February 2003, the first licence was submitted to the Assembly and “*The Prime Ministry Licence regarding permitting the deployment of technical and military staff belonging to the United States of America in Turkey for the necessary renewal, development, construction, expanding and infrastructure operations of the military bases and facilities and also ports in Turkey, for three months, in accordance with the 92nd article of the Constitution*” was accepted by a large majority.¹ Accordingly, about 4000 American soldiers would come to Turkey in order to participate in the modernization operations of the bases and the ports.

Meanwhile, economic negotiations continuing between the US and Turkey were going on this process about which Bush told that it turned into *horse bargain* created displeasure in Turkish Armed Forces and Turkish Public Opinion (Bila, 2003, p.210). As a result of the pressures of the US on Turkish government, on 1 March 2003, The Prime Ministry Licence was put to vote to permit “*sending Turkish Armed Forces to foreign countries, hosting foreign armed forces elements in Turkey for six months and making necessary regulations for transferring militant elements to out of Turkey in accordance with the 92nd article of the Constitution*”. 533 members of parliament participated in the closed session held in the Assembly. The licence was rejected with 264 affirmative, 250 rejection and 19 abstention votes. That the Northern Front was closed due to the rejection of the licence in the Assembly was welcomed with pleasure by both Turkish citizens

¹ “Türkiye’deki askerî üs ve tesisler ile limanlarda gerekli yenileştirme, geliştirme, inşaat ve tevsi çalışmaları ile alt yapı faaliyetlerinde bulunmak amacıyla, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri’ne mensup teknik ve askerî personelin 3 Ay Süreyle Türkiye’de bulunmasına, Anayasanın 92 nci maddesi uyarınca izin verilmesine dair Başbakanlık tezkeresi”, 06 February 2003.

and other anti-war world citizens. The rejection of the licence caused the most nerve-shredding relationships between the two countries (Caşın and Kılıçoğlu, 2004, p.128-131).

Although the 1 March licence was rejected, Turkey took steps backward in order to support the US in the operation it started in Iraq. After a short while following the rejection of the licence on 20 March, the US requested the necessary permits in order to use Turkish Air Corridor. One day after, on 21 March 2003, the licence which opened Turkish Airspace to the use of the US by favour of the Assembly and which regarded “*sending Turkish Armed Forces to the Northern Iraq and permitting utilization of Turkish Airspace by air components belonging to foreign armed forces for six months,*” was accepted.² On the same day, the US and British aircrafts started bombing Iraq. Turkey, which provided support all by opening its airspace to the US in the Iraq operation, provided support for the US in many aspects during the war. Aircrafts carrying injured people used İncirlik Air Base during the operation. Additionally, a permit was provided for the aircrafts that the US withdrew from Turkey following the rejection of the licence in order for them to land to İncirlik Base in case of emergency.

Conclusion

US bases have important functions in that they contribute to the American hegemony in military, economic, political terms of the countries where they are established. After Turkey became a member of NATO, the most important base in its territory, İncirlik, has been an important factor when it comes to the progress of relationships. In this sense, İncirlik, did not become a tool for the development of American hegemony in the region, it served to the inclusion of Turkey in the hegemony.

Although in the first years of its establishment, İncirlik was planned with the purpose of serving as an advanced base for bomber aircrafts by the US Strategic Air Command against the Soviet Union, it was used for many purposes by the American officials due to the advantages it provided in cases of interventions in the crisis in the Middle East. New threat and risk perceptions that emerged after 11 September terror attacks brought a new dimension to the Turkey and the US relations.

After *Constant Freedom Operation*, the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s rejection of licence for the support that would be provided by Turkey especially

² Türk Silahlı Kuvvetlerinin Kuzey Irak’a Gönderilmesine; bu Kuvvetlerin Gerektiğinde Belirlenecek Esaslar Dairesinde Kullanılmasına ve Muhtemel Bir Askeri Harekat Çerçevesinde Yabancı Silahlı Kuvvetlere Mensup Hava Unsurlarının Türk Hava Sahasını Türk Makamları Tarafından Belirlenecek Esaslara ve Kurallara Göre Kullanmaları İçin Gerekli Düzenlemelerin Yapılmasına, Anayasanın 92nci Maddesi Uyarınca 6 Ay Süreyle İzin Verilmesine Dair Karar, 20 March 2003.

with İncirlik base to the operation that the US would conduct in Iraq, caused injuries that are difficult to repair between Turkey and the US. Nevertheless, the demands of the US on the use of İncirlik Base continued uninterruptedly and Turkey's attitude which gave concessions had a constructive effect on the improvement of the relations between the two countries. That the request of providing rotation for 120 American soldiers in Iraq over İncirlik was accepted by Turkey and permitting the utilization of İncirlik by the United States of America within the scope of *Logistics Transfer Operation* afterwards were the developments that caused relaxation in the relationships.

İncirlik was a platform that directly reflected the air in Turkish-American relations after it was founded. The United States does not hesitate to apply military sanctions on the country with which it is an ally when it cannot discipline a problematic country. Turkey instrumentalized base utilization by completely closing İncirlik base to the use of the US in return for economic sanctions implemented by the US during the *Cyprus Peace Operation*. The base opened for active use during periods of good relations was closed to use of the US in some periods when the relations became tense and diplomatically lower. Moreover, what happened in the Iraq War process revealed that the United States could wage war and use the İncirlik Base by violating international law in the absence of United Nations or NATO resolutions.

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