

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

HISTORY

EXTENDED ESSAY

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Word Count: 3849

Research Question: To what extent the approaches of Turkish, American and British press' to the coup d'état that occurred May 27th, 1960 in Turkey similar?

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HOW THE COUP WAS LOOKED UPON

1. Abstract

The coup d'état of 27 May 1960 in Turkey has shaped the Turkish politics and the Turkey's political history. This event was marked as the first military intervention in the history of the Turkish Republic, preceding the ultimatum of 12 March 1970 and the coup of 12 September 1980. The ruling Democrat Party was ousted by the Turkish Army when the country was experiencing chaos and dissent. The intent of this essay is to compare and contrast the approaches of Turkish, American and British press' to the coup in Turkey. Works of two adversary journalists from Turkish press; Bedii Faik Akin and Nadir Nadi was chosen (no press that backed the fallen government could be found as the coup was made by the Turkish army.) Newspapers such as *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post and Times Herald* was used for the American press and the newspaper *The Times* was used for the British press. Each press focused primarily on General Gürsel's promise of free vote and democracy. A stress on Turkey's geopolitical importance with respect to the Cold War's conjunction was also made by each of the press'. American and Turkish press also mentioned about the coup's being made in order to ensure the continuity of Turkey's Kemalist policies. It is observed that the newspapers of the United States indicate the financial aids made to Turkey, for Turkey's agricultural and industrial improvement; and that these monetary aids were used arbitrarily by the Prime Minister Menderes. Newspapers such as *New York Times* claims that the Premier used these

funds arbitrarily, without making any plans regarding the development of Turkey; neither cultural, social or financial.

2. Introduction

May 27th of year 1960 was a critical day for the twentieth century history of Turkey, as the Turkish army seized the control of the state which was governed by the ‘Democrat Party’, with its premier Adnan Menderes and his cabinet. Throughout the world, this event had been on the focus of newspapers for quite a long time. Trials have been held in Yassıada after which 3 people were hanged and many imprisoned. This issue has been very controversial since the execution of Premier Adnan Menderes, the minister of economy Hasan Polatkan and the minister of foreign relations Fatin Rüştü Zorlu.

The aim of this essay is to examine, compare and contrast the approaches of American and British press with the Turkish press on the focus of the May coup. For the American press, newspaper articles and columns from newspapers “*New York Times*”, “*Los Angeles Times*”, “*Washington Post and Herald*”, “*Wall Street Journal*” and “*Christian Science Monitor*” will be used while *The Times* will be used for the British press. The columns of Nadir Nadi, a journalist of “*Cumhuriyet (The Republic)*”, which opposed the fallen government, and a memoire of Bedii Faik, another adversary journalist who was the co-founder of the newspaper “*Dünya (The World)*”, will be used for the Turkish press.

The reason why this course, History; and the topic May 27 coup has been chosen is because of a special interest in History as a social science, and especially the twentieth century history of Turkey. The aftermaths of the events that occurred in this era are visible in the twenty first century, and there are living witnesses¹. It may sound far away from today, but only 50 years, half a decade is in consideration. 50 years is like a few days for history, as history examines

¹ Star Newspaper, Ahmet Kekeç, 13.12.10

any human material that has ever been on earth, which makes thousands of years. In addition to this, as a Turkish teen, the need to be aware of the recent history of Turkey was felt, for the fact that knowing the past is the key for making right decisions in the future. “*History teaches everything including the future.*”².

An important point that should be taken into consideration is that after the coup in Turkey, the pro-government press has become mute because of the junta. For this reason, a proper source which supports the fallen government could not be found during the research.

The reigning Democrat Party (DP) reached its zenith in the mid 1950’s, but with the effect of a financial crisis, dissent formed among many Turkish citizen. The industrialists were not satisfied with their condition; they thought that the agriculture of Turkey was unfairly better funded than the industry of the Turkey. Following this fact, DP lost most of the support of the large cities and industrial centers. Some vague interpretations of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s aims and interpretations also caused dissent among many university students. A considerably powerful opposition was formed against DP, and eventually the country witnessed a turmoil, which was resolved with the intervention of the Turkish Army.³

3. Analysis of May Coup with the Different Approaches of Turkish and Foreign Press

3.1 Turkish Press

The remarkable resources used for the analyzing of the Turkish press’ approach to the May coup are the memoir of Bedii Faik Akın, columnist of the newspaper “*Dünya*” and the daily columns of Nadir Nadi, from the newspaper “*Cumhuriyet*” and given below respectively.

² Quote belongs to Alphonso Lamartine, retrieved from http://www.giga-usa.com/quotes/authors/alphonse_lamartine_a001.htm

³ “Gençler İçin Çağdaş Tarih”, Ahmet Kuyaş. Pages 288-307.

Bedii Faik:

In his memoir; “İhtilalciler Arasında bir Gazeteci (A Journalist Amongst Coupists)”, Bedii Faik Akin reflects his comments and his observations which give important information regarding the May coup and the trials that followed. He starts his book describing the ‘open and secret influential powers’ after the coup:

“Following were open or discrete powers that were influential in Turkey in those days:

On one hand there was the National Unity Committee despite the cracks and concrete disputes within itself and on the other hand there was the Armed Forces Union that was self-established contrary to the prevailing practices of the military and that had gathered the members of the military who had distanced themselves with the Committee. On one side there was the CHP (Republican People’s Party) which had regarded the coup being conducted in order to activate all tools to bring them to power and which has a party organization that had become the turbine of informants and on the other side there was the media and the University which had constantly divided, perplexed and stirred with the movements of the leftist scorpions... And finally there was the vast masses whose only slogan was – They cannot execute! They cannot execute!...This group comes close towards any direction from where they hear whispers and at where they

regard it would be safe to raise voice and then make that place their venue for provocation...’’⁴

It can be understood from what Faik has written that his journalism is not affected by any influential power such as the MBK (National Unity Committee), SKB (Army Forces Unity), CHP or supporters of Menderes. He, as a journalist, approaches the issue as objective as he can. Furthermore, it is clearly seen in Faik’s approach to this coup and its aftermath is that he is completely against the executions of people responsible. He investigates the reason of this execution and the people after it. He even claims that there has been a plot to execute the Head of the State Celal Bayar, by making a law that allows this.⁵ Faik also gives names of several people who were interested in Menderes’ execution. Most of these people have part in the coup and the trials of Yassıada. A militarist vision had formed amongst the lieutenants within the MBK, which is seen in the press declarations and radio programs.⁶ Faik thinks that these lieutenants want to use this spirit of militarism to enhance the spirit of the coup and strengthen it.

In addition to these, on the coup itself, Faik thinks that this revolution is the aftermath of a social polarization, which caused dissent and chaos in the country, since the beginning of the multi-party period:

“In every country there are people who feel pain gradually, who are in joy, who are bored or relaxed, cry or laugh. However, for one side to laugh, there is no need for another side to cry or there is no rule that for one side to be happy there should be another side that face disaster.

⁴ Bedii Faik, page 12

⁵ Bedii Faik, page 13

⁶ Bedii Faik, page 15

In May 27, 1960 there was such a rule in Turkey. This is what being divided into two camps mean. Us, for many years were divided into two by pushing each other or poking each other. It was such that for one side to laugh, the other side should be crying”⁷

Moreover, Faik finds it essential to mention that after the coup, Turkey’s allegiance to NATO⁸ and CENTO⁹ is important for the fact that it proves that Turkey is still with “*the West*” in the cold war. Faik is aware of Turkey’s geopolitical significance for the polarized world: “*We are loyal to NATO and CENTO... This statement eliminated the first concern that came to mind right after the coup which was -we wonder whether it is red` .*¹⁰

Nadir Nadi:

Nadir Nadi, the editor of Chief of “Cumhuriyet (Republic)”, has a considerably different idea regarding the issue. When the anthology of his columns which he wrote during the days of the coup is examined, it is clearly seen that Nadi is approaching the issue ideologically. He is criticizing the fallen government because of anti-democratic and anti-Kemalist applications. This is mainly because that, as the name of the newspaper Nadi works for suggests, he is fond of the republic as a political system and he is supporting the ideals of Kemalism:

“The contemporary civilization that Atatürk had pointed out is based on the principle of human rights which was developed by the Western world for centuries. Us living strongly, happily and freely as a nation depends on our keeping those rights standing on their foot. On May 27 of the year 1960, the new generations had proven in a glorious way that they would not tolerate for long

⁷ Bedii Faik, page 27

⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization

⁹ Central Treaty Organization

¹⁰ Bedii Faik, page 29

periods the dictatorships that would be established on these lands indirectly or directly.”¹¹

According to him, this coup is a re-maneuver to the ideals of Kemalism from a possible threat of obscurantism. He refers to the “Grand Speech” and Mustafa Kemal’s words while accusing the Democrat Party:

“Atatürk did not deliver his Grand Speech with no reason. There was a reason for him vesting his great masterpiece to the Turkish Youth. And us, there is a reason for us to celebrate the August 30 for 38 years... They may disregard the nation, they may crush the interests of the nation. They may attempt to make Atatürk be forgotten about and further more they may try to establish a front against him. They may consider heinous measures to pull down his masterpieces. All these possibilities that Atatürk had mentioned in his Grand Speech one by one, had started appearing in our country fifteen years after his passing away. However, the Turkish Youth and the Turkish military (we cannot separate them from each other), who bear the responsibility of the country that they had taken over from their founding father, noticed the bad intentions and secret goals in the final end and they did not allow those to happen.”¹²

The significance of this coup and its being unique is stated by Nadi. According to him, the generals responsible for the coup usually don’t step down from politics when the order is assured; they tend to remain in power and control as long as possible. The May coup is much different. Promise of free election is given, and General Gürsel, the head of the state, promised to step down from politics and military as soon as possible.¹³

¹¹ Nadir Nadi, page 13

¹² Nadir Nadi, 30

¹³ Nadir Nadi, 95

Moreover, he suggests that the obscurants accuse anyone with ideas that would prove useful in modernizing Turkey of being “communist.” Because of these obscurant people, the freedom of “Free Thought” is jeopardized and the democracy of Turkey is damaged.¹⁴ Nadi claims that the fallen government, Democrat Party made obscurant applications throughout Turkey in order to gain the votes of conservative people, mostly the farmers in Inner Anatolia. The revolutions of Atatürk were tried to be reversed. The Latin alphabet (which was made official instead of Arabic alphabet in 1928, by Atatürk) was neglected; the education of females was wanted to be interrupted. In this context, the ousting of the government in May 27th is against an ideology, not a political party. The republicanism ideal of Kemalist thought is “revived” with the coup.¹⁵

3.2 Foreign Press:

The remarkable resources used for the analyzing of the foreign press’ approach to the May coup are the daily columns of newspapers; “*New York Times*”, “*Los Angeles Times*”, “*Washington Post*” and *Herald*, “*Wall Street Journal*” and “*Christian Science Monitor*” in American press and “*The Times*” for the British press. The analysis of these resources are thematically listed.

3.2.1 American Press:

3.2.1.1 Promise of Free Vote and Democracy

The United States’ press emphasizes the promise given of free vote by General Gürsel, the temporary Premier after the coup.¹⁶¹⁷ This promise is important in such a way that it shows

¹⁴ Nadir Nadi, 23

¹⁵ Nadir Nadi, 67,73

¹⁶ “TURKISH ARMY OUSTS GOVERNMENT IN COUP”. *Los Angeles Times*; May 27, 1960.

¹⁷ “Constitutional Turkey”. *Christian Science Monitor*; July 13, 1961.

that the course ahead of Turkey will be democratic. It ensures that this coup will not turn General Gürsel into a dictator, and twist Turkey from a presidential republic to an autocracy. *The Washington Post, Times Herald*; on its issue of May 27,1961, comments over an act of Gürsel, which is an evidence that Gürsel supports democracy:

*‘‘ For the first time, under the constitution, there will be a clear separation of executive, legislative and judicial functions with provision for judicial review. The rights and privileges of citizens are defined, and the previously all-powerful one-house legislature is replaced by a two-chamber system so as to provide a check upon arbitrary action. ’’*¹⁸

An important aspect of the coup, as examined by the American press, is the reality that the Menderes government being ousted bloodlessly. The swift and peaceful coup would cause enormous public support to the Turkish army¹⁹. After the coup, a huge crowd celebrated the coup and the American press was interested in the occasion: *‘‘In Istanbul earlier today, some 200,000 persons danced through the streets in joy over the announcement that Gursel would head the provisional government. ’’*²⁰

3.2.1.2 Discussion on Turkey’s Geopolitical and Strategic Role After the Coup.

When the political conjuncture of the 1960’s is considered, the times when “the Cold War” is on its peak, US being the western pole of the world and the USSR being the eastern, the coup that occurred in Turkey was also important for the *‘‘Free World’’*²¹.

¹⁸ “Turkey’s Opportunity”. *The Washington Post , Times Herald*; May 27, 1961.

¹⁹ “U.S. RECOGNIZES TURKISH REGIME”. *New York Times*; May 31, 1960.

²⁰ “Menderes and His Cabinet Will Be Held”. *Los Angeles Times*; May 29, 1960.

²¹ “Allies Welcome Turkey Coup as End to Crisis”. *Los Angeles Times*; May 28, 1960

General Gürsel pronounced after the seizure of Menderes' government, Turkey would still be in NATO and CENTO organizations, remaining loyal to the Western polar of the Cold war.

At this point, geopolitical importance of Turkey to the "Free World" should be mentioned. Being stationed in the Asia Minor, Turkey is *"the anchor of both the southern flank of North Atlantic alliance, guarding non-Communist Europe, and of the western flank of the Central Treaty Organization, guarding non-Communist Asia, and since it has been until recently the strongest democracy in the Middle East.."*²².

As seen in the article from *New York Times*, Turkey is depicted as America's outpost in Asia Minor; defending the non-Communist World. This approach is a reflection of the rising tension between the US and the USSR on those days: The communist revolution in Cuba in 1959 might have been the cause of this tension. Turkey is important to the West because that it is the force that prevents the spread of Communism to Europe and Asia. It actually acts as the barrier between the East and the West. In other words, Turkey is thought to be the ally of the United States of America.^{23 24 25}

3.2.1.3. Applications of PM Menderes and US Involvement.

An internal point that Americas press use to justify the coup is the applications of the fallen Premier Adnan Menderes. Although it is accepted that Menderes was behind the industrialization of Turkey, it is suggested that his economic strategies brought Turkey on the verge of bankruptcy.

²² "Military Rule in Turkey". *New York Times*; 28 May, 1960.

²³ "TURKEY—LAND, PEOPLE, AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND". *New York Times*; May 29, 1960.

²⁴ "U.S. RECOGNIZES TURKISH REGIME". *New York Times*; May 31, 1960.

²⁵ "Turkish Turnover". *Wall Street Journal*; June 2, 1960.

*‘‘ He initiated a transformation of the country from a purely agricultural to an increasingly industrial economy. . Unfortunately, his economic policies led to growing inflation and price increases that began to erode his party’s popularity. ’’*²⁶

In addition to this, it is suggested that in order to gain the votes of the majority of the conservatives, Menderes promoted radical Islamism. This was surely against the secularism ideal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk²⁷; which meant these applications would damage the modernization process of Turkey. After Atatürk made many reforms regarding secularism; Menderes’ supporting the radical Islamists caused the secular opposition to be provoked.

The main reason Menderes is reflected guilty in his economic applications is because of the monetary aid that was made by the United States to Turkey. More than 3 billion dollars worth aid was made to Turkey between 1946 and 1959, throughout the regime of Adnan Menderes.²⁸²⁹³⁰

American newspapers claim that this aid was for the stabilizing of Turkish economy; but instead Premier Adnan Menderes used this money to improve his political standing with the community. *Los Angeles Times*’ issue on 28 May 1960 comments on this:

‘Since 1947 the United States has given Turkey more than 3\$ billion in economic and military aid. Despite this massive assistance, Turkey’s economy is in the grip of a galloping inflation so destructive that it has seriously obstructed effective modernization of her armed forces. Their political enemies blame this situation on Menderes and his chief lieutenant,

²⁶ “Military Rule in Turkey”. New York Times; May 28, 1960.

²⁷ “TURKEY—LAND, PEOPLE, AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND”. New York Times; May 29, 1960.

²⁸ “TURKEY—LAND, PEOPLE, AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND”. New York Times; May 29, 1960.

²⁹ “Turkey’s Junta Faces Monumental Problems”. Los Angeles Times; November 6, 1960.

³⁰ “Allies Welcome Turkey Coup as End to Crisis”. Los Angeles Times; May 28, 1960.

Foreign Minister Fatim Zorlu who, they allege, have shamelessly used U.S aid for political agrandizement. ’’³¹

On another issue of *Los Angeles Times*, Menderes is directly accused of spending the U.S aid irresponsibly, wasting the opportunity of correcting the economic problems of Turkey:

‘‘ Turkey’s credit became so worthless that in 1958 a desperate Menderes finally agreed to overhaul his finances in order to get \$359 million in allied credits. These millions were supposed to put Turkey in a balance. But Menderes spent it so fast that the treasury has been in deficit since October, 1959. ’’³²

3.2.2. British press:

The Times newspaper focuses foremost on General Gursel’s address to people, which is, for the newspaper, important for two aspects; which are going to be examined . In this address of Cemal Gürsel, he states that:

‘‘ Turkey made the revolution of May 27, 1960, in order to build a democratic regime in the full western sense of the world... For this reason there has never been any question of the Army wishing to rule Turkey by means of a military junta. ’’³³

³¹ “Allies Welcome Turkey as End to Crisis”. *Los Angeles Times*; May 28, 1960.

³² “Turkey’s Junta Faces Monumental Problems”. *Los Angeles Times*; November 6, 1960.

³³ “Pledge To Turkey By Gen. Gursel: Building A Democratic Regime”, *The Times*; February 6, 1961

3.2.2.1. Discussion on Turkey's Geopolitical and Strategic Role After the Coup.

Gursel states that the coup he headed was to build a regime “ in the full western sense”. When the context of the cold war is considered, Gursel mentions that Turkey will be with the West throughout the cold war. The geopolitical properties of Turkey was very essential for the “free world”(as mentioned before when examining the American press’ approach). The United Kingdom was with the western block against communism and its global representative; USSR. This is related with the geographic coordinates of Turkey. Turkey is the connection between East and West, and for the western world, Turkey is a strategic key, being so close to the Soviet Union.

Although the correspondent of *The Times* in Turkey does not comment on this issue, he must have found this statement of Gursel important and valuable; as this statement was published after all. This shows a part of the approach of the British press to the May coup.

3.2.2.2 Promise to Bring Back Democracy

As Gursel states in his address, his intention to bring democracy back to Turkey as soon as possible, is another aspect that *The Times* newspaper examines.

The background of democracy in Turkey is looked upon as an important factor for the coup. The recent political history of Turkey is included in an issue of *The Times*. The significance of the coup is reflected by the press, via the application of the Army. A “representative assembly” was formed after the coup, which was an indication of a democratic state. In addition to this, the restrictions on political activities were revoked. As a result, free thought and equality was encouraged. A reference to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is also made. The

democratic applications and the effort of the Turkish Army to accomplish these, were parallel to Mustafa Kemal's vision of Turkey: A democratic "modern European nation."³⁴

4. Conclusion

The approaches of the British , American, and Turkish press to the coup that occurred in Turkey on May 27th 1960, resulting in the fall of Adnan Menderes' government, are similar in many ways, and some differences between them are also noticed:

First of all, all the representatives of these three nations' press' emphasize the importance of democracy that was ensured afterwards the coup by General Gursel. Although the democracy was interrupted because of the coup, the promise of free vote given by Gursel is a guarantee for Turkey that military autocracy would be avoided at all costs. The applications of the army support this claim: The political convicts and press personnel that were in prison since the Menderes' government's service, were freed.³⁵ The opening of the Representative Assembly is also another proof of the intent of the army.

Commentary over the coup in relation to the cold war were made , the memoire of Bedii Faik reflects the suspicion of the possibility that the coup's being made by communists, until an announcement was made by the army.

A similar approach is visible in the American and the British press, but with the difference that the press' of these nations were aware of the fact that Turkey would remain with the capitalist world. Turkey's allegiance with the "free world" was of course in favor of the United States and the United Kingdom. These nations were considered West. Throughout the

³⁴"Turkey Tries Again at Democracy", The Times; February 6, 1961.

³⁵ "GEN. GURSEL HEADS TURKISH CABINET; LIFTS REPRESSION". New York Times; May 29, 1960.

Cold War, Turkey being close to the Soviet Union and yet remaining capitalist is very important for these nations. Turkey is seen as a “bastion” of defense against communism.

The applications of Adnan Menderes prior to the coup, was also a common aspect that the Turkish and American press examined. Nadi examined the applications of Menderes’ government as violations of Kemalist thought; whereas Faik didn’t comment about this issue in his memoire.

The foreign press, on the other hand, took the issue in a different point of view. Especially the American press indicated the monetary aid Menderes received from the United States. It is directly claimed by the newspapers that Menderes used this aid (which was for the improvement of Turkish economy) for his political expenses.

After a decade, the reign of Democrat Party shattered as it witnessed many financial, social and political problems. DP had been the center of many dissents. People living in cities, industrialists, students and the army were not satisfied with the executive branch of the Turkish Republic. This resulted with the ousting of Premier Adnan Menderes and his Democrat Party by the Turkish Army on 27th May,1960.

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