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Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Presidential Determination No. 97-24 of May 23, 1997

The President

Waiver of Statutory Restrictions To Permit Assistance to Turkey

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Pursuant to subsection (b) of section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, I hereby determine that it is in the national security interest of the United States that assistance be furnished to Turkey without regard to the restriction in subsection (a) of section 620I.

You are authorized and directed to transmit this determination and justification to the Congress and to arrange for its publication in the **Federal Register**.



THE WHITE HOUSE,
Washington, May 23, 1997.

Memorandum of Justification Regarding Determination Under Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended

The Administration fully supports the goal of maintaining open humanitarian aid corridors and has actively worked through diplomatic channels to encourage the speedy and efficient flow of humanitarian goods. The application of section 620I requires a careful consideration of the circumstances in each case. This is particularly true with respect to Turkey.

Strong feelings of ethnic kinship exist between the Turks and Azerbaijanis, and the Turkish government has resisted public pressures to become directly involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Until March, 1993, Turkey permitted U.S. humanitarian and other non-military shipments destined for Yerevan to transit Turkish territory in response to the grave situation in Armenia. However, Turkey closed its land borders to Armenia in 1993 when local Armenian forces seized large areas of Azerbaijan despite UN Security Council resolutions calling for the withdrawal of all occupying forces and cessation of hostilities.

Since 1994, Turkey has taken several unilateral steps to improve its bilateral ties with Armenia while balancing its relations with Azerbaijan and supporting the OSCE's Minsk Group talks on resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Most notably, Turkey reopened an air corridor to Armenia in 1995. In another positive step, in March, 1996 Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz publicly expressed willingness to reopen the land border with Armenia once Armenia and Azerbaijan agree upon a statement of principles for a settlement of the conflict. Turkey's land border with Armenia, however, remains closed for the present. A large volume of assistance—mostly food and oil—as well as an increasing volume of commercial traffic flow by ship through the Turkish Straits to Georgian ports for shipment by rail to Armenia. Should the border be reopened, we are likely to continue to ship most assistance to Armenia through Georgia to take advantage of its more developed rail network.

It is very much in our national security interests not to terminate U.S. assistance programs for Turkey. Such a termination would create significant difficulties in our bilateral relations, affecting a broad range of national security interests. Such a termination would also reduce prospects for the successful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Turkey is at the nexus of a number of issues that are critical for the U.S. on the Eurasian continent: securing peace in the Balkans, advancing a settlement in Cyprus and resolution of Aegean issues, containing Iraq and Iran, bringing stability to the Caucasus, implementing the CFE treaty, addressing the future of NATO and bringing Caspian Basin oil to the West. Turkey hosts the continuing U.S.-led coalition effort to protect the Kurdish populations of northern Iraq, and has increasingly important and useful relationships with Israel and the moderate Arab states of the Middle East. Finally, Turkey is important for U.S. trade and investment, and has been designated as one of the ten big emerging markets for U.S. companies by the Department of Commerce.

There are over 3,000 uniformed military and civilian DoD personnel (excluding dependents) stationed in Turkey, a democratic, secular nation in a region with weak democratic traditions, and widespread political instability. Incirlik, the easternmost NATO Air Base, and other NATO-dedicated bases in Turkey are essential for the projection of U.S./NATO power into an unstable region having critical oil resources. Some 2,700 sorties were flown out of Incirlik during the Gulf War.