



A Deficit of Coherence?

Türkiye and the Search for American Strategic Reason

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Introduction

A nation's survival hinges on power, yet the zenith of superpower status can paradoxically erode the strategic reasoning essential to sustain it. During the Cold War, the United States maintained strategic discipline by balancing its economic and military might against a peer competitor, the Soviet Union. However, the post-Cold War unipolar order disrupted this equilibrium, giving rise to a critical paradox: an excess of power began to dull Washington's capacity for long-term strategic thought (Gaddis, 2005).

This erosion has been accelerated by the transformation of U.S. foreign policy from a long-term strategic enterprise into a reflexive system driven by lobbying networks, domestic polarisation, and short-term political gains. This condition aligns with Jürgen Habermas's concept of a "rationality crisis," where a system's mastery of means—its technical and administrative power—expands even as its ability to generate coherent, purpose-oriented ends collapses (Habermas, 1975). In the American context, this crisis manifests as a foreign policy that increasingly treats power not as an instrument of strategy, but as a mechanism of reassurance, attempting to compensate for a lack of planning through military force and sanctions.

Compounding this intellectual crisis is the erosion of the material foundations of American power. The United States' critical dependency on China for rare earth elements (REEs)—essential for defence, digital technology, and renewable energy—reveals that its technological superiority no longer guarantees material independence (Moran, 2021). This vulnerability makes the recalibration of U.S. strategic rationale not just imperative but urgent.

It is at this strategic juncture that Türkiye's importance becomes decisive. Positioned at the

nexus of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and possessing the world's second-largest reserves of rare earth elements, Türkiye has the potential to become a "hub of critical minerals" (Anadolu Agency, 2022). This capacity offers the West a tangible path to reduce its dependency on China and re-establish equilibrium in global supply chains. Consequently, institutional cooperation with Ankara is not a mere tactical option but a foundational partnership for sustaining U.S. global leadership.

The recent rapprochement between Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underscores this strategic logic. When the urgent need for rare earth elements among Trump's technology backers is considered, this diplomatic interest transcends personal chemistry, reflecting instead an emerging nexus of power, technology, and raw materials. In this sense, strengthening ties with Ankara represents a potential step toward overcoming America's rationality crisis. Yet, this rational impulse exists in direct tension with the enduring influence of pro-Israel, Armenian, and Greek lobbies, whose anti-Türkiye agendas perpetuate the very paradox at the heart of the crisis.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the fundamental challenge for the United States is not a deficit of power, but a deficit of coherence. It will first delineate the mechanisms—such as the electoral finance cycle and bureaucratic capture—through which lobbying produces strategic irrationality. It will then present the case of Türkiye as a critical litmus test: a partner whose geopolitical and geo-economic assets offer solutions to core U.S. strategic problems, yet whose potential is consistently undermined by the self-defeating policies born of America's internal rationality crisis. Overcoming this crisis requires the U.S. to re-discover state-level strategic reasoning and realign its policy means with its declared global ends.



(Celal Güneş - Anadolu Agency)

Lobby Networks and the Institutional Erosion of Strategic Rationality

In American politics, lobbies are not merely interest groups; they often function as informal decision-making bodies that determine the direction of foreign policy. This situation signifies a structural distortion that has eroded the U.S. state's institutional rationality. Washington today represents not the interests of the state but the representatives of interests themselves. Consequently, American foreign policy is increasingly shaped by the logic of a financial-donation economy. This marks the institutional dimension of the "crisis of rationality": interests can be defined, but they can no longer be produced.

The Mechanisms of Irrationality: How Lobbies Displace Strategic Ends

The transformation of U.S. foreign policy from a strategic enterprise into a reflex-driven system operates through three identifiable mechanisms that short-circuit rational planning.

1- The Electoral Financing Cycle.

The *Citizens United* decision (2010) fused foreign policy decisions with the rhythms of campaign finance. When policy is financed, its time horizon shrinks to the next election cycle. This decision allowed corporations to support political campaigns without limits, effectively linking foreign policy decisions to financial cycles (Weiner, 2019). As a result, interest networks in Washington began to determine not the direction of strategy but its cost and boundaries. As Andrew Bacevich (2008) noted, America has transformed from a state that defines national interests into a marketplace that balances competing ones. This transformation has replaced rational strategy in U.S. foreign policy with financial reflexes.

The systemic consequences of this structure are observable across multiple domains. The 2003 Iraq War revealed the impact of defence lobbies on rational policymaking. Between 2002 and 2003, defence contractors such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Halliburton increased their lobbying expenditures by approximately 4.1% (Open-

Secrets, 2002–2003). The narrative of “weapons of mass destruction” was legitimised through the media, and the U.S. invaded Iraq.

The withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 is another prime example. While the agreement served the long-term strategic end of curbing Iran’s nuclear program, it was sacrificed to the short-term political gratification demanded by lobbying groups like AIPAC, which contributed financially to over 200 members of Congress in the 2024 cycle (OpenSecrets, 2025). The result was a policy means (withdrawal) that actively harmed the strategic end (non-proliferation). Whereas Iran’s uranium enrichment level was constrained to around 3.67% (Hickey, 2020), Tehran escalated its uranium enrichment to 60% after Trump squashed the agreement (Cutter, 2019; Özçelik & Okur, 2021).

2. Bureaucratic and Legislative Capture

Lobbying networks do not merely influence policy; they become embedded within it, drafting legislation and steering procurement. The CAATSA sanctions imposed on Türkiye exemplify this. Although the legislation was designed for a broad strategic end (deterring Russian arms purchases), its application to a NATO ally was the direct result of pressure from Armenian and Greek lobbies. This capture led to a paradoxical outcome: a policy meant to strengthen U.S. security (CAATSA) was used in a way that weakened it, by alienating a key ally and costing the U.S. an estimated \$500–600 million (Sanders & Akca, 2020). The institutional process was hijacked, producing a self-harming outcome.

3. Policy Incoherence and Inertia

The first two mechanisms produce a foreign policy that is both unstable and unresponsive to changing global conditions. As policies reset with each administration and become captive to fixed interest groups, the U.S. loses the capacity for strategic adaptation. The unconditional support for Israel, driven by a powerful lobby-defence industry nexus, continues despite severe damage to U.S. moral legitimacy and global trust. The policy is immune to strategic reassessment because it has become, in effect, “the insurance policy of the campaign finance system.” This inertia is the ultimate sign of a rationality crisis: the system continues to operate, but it can no longer learn or correct its course.

4. Reputational Damage

In 2019, sanctions imposed on Venezuela enabled major energy corporations such as ExxonMobil and Chevron to reposition their market shares across Latin America. While these sanctions benefited corporate interests, they inflicted severe reputational damage on U.S. regional credibility. In this context, a humanitarian crisis was transformed from a matter of strategic policy into a market instrument (Roy & Cheatham, 2024).

Between 2022 and 2025, major technology firms such as Meta Platforms, Google LLC, and NVIDIA Corporation significantly intensified their lobbying efforts before both the U.S. government and Congress; in the first half of this period alone, eight major companies spent over USD 36 million on lobbying. Policies such as “AI export controls” and “semiconductor sanctions” reflected not merely efforts to preserve strategic superiority but the transformation of commercial interests into the geopolitical disguise of strategy itself (Minkin, 2025).

However, the most destructive manifestation of lobbying influence is found in the United States’ unconditional support for Israel—perhaps the clearest symptom of the irrationality crisis in foreign policy. This support is driven not by strategic calculation but by lobbying, finance, and domestic political necessity. Since 1948, the U.S. has provided Israel with more than USD 260 billion in military and economic assistance; in the 2023–2025 period alone, the amount exceeded USD 30 billion (Yüksel, 2025).

This backing arises from the fusion of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) ’s influence in domestic politics with the profit networks of the defence industry. In the 2024 election cycle, AIPAC raised over USD 50 million and contributed financially to more than 200 members of Congress (OpenSecrets, 2025). These donations replaced ethical and strategic considerations in foreign policy with political obligations. The majority of U.S. aid to Israel consisted of munitions produced by Lockheed Martin and Raytheon Technologies Corporation, turning U.S. support for Israel into a cyclical profit mechanism for the American defence industry (Congressional Research Service, 2025).



(Celal Güneş - Anadolu Agency)

The Consequences of Irrationality

This dependency has generated harmful consequences on three levels. First, it has led to the loss of moral legitimacy. In the face of Israel's massacres of civilians in Gaza, the U.S. discourse on "human rights" has lost credibility. Second, global trust has eroded—not only in Muslim-majority countries but also across Europe, where U.S. and Israeli policies are increasingly criticised. Third, domestic captivity has become permanent. Regardless of the administration in power, unconditional support for Israel has become a "sacred consensus," deviation from which constitutes political suicide. Consequently, U.S. policy toward Israel is no longer a foreign policy choice but the insurance policy of the campaign finance system. America's presence in Gaza does not generate interest; it merely purchases political legitimacy shaped by money and lobbying power. This represents the purest form of rationality crisis: the U.S. no longer manages its power—it merely finances it.

All these examples illustrate three fundamental outcomes of the U.S. lobby-centred foreign policy. First, policies are reset with every new administration because interest networks shift. Second, the American discourse of democracy and freedom contradicts its internal structures of interest dependency. Third, other nations now perceive Washington's commitments as confined to the duration of political cycles. This structural reality is also key to understanding U.S. policy toward Türkiye.

Washington's approach to Ankara reflects not just bilateral dynamics but also the projection of this interest-based system. The pro-Israel, Armenian, and Greek lobbies are the three most influential actors in shaping U.S. policy toward Türkiye. Although motivated by different agendas, these groups converge on one objective: to constrain Türkiye's foreign policy autonomy and redirect Washington's decision-making toward their own axes of interest.

The CAATSA sanctions illustrate this influence vividly. Although the legislation was designed to target arms purchases from Russia, its application to Türkiye resulted directly from coordinated pressure by Armenian and Greek lobbies. The campaign led by Senator Bob Menendez was financed by media funds provided by HALC and ANCA (ANCA, 2020). According to the Pentagon's 2020 report, Türkiye's removal from the F-35 program cost the U.S. approximately USD 500–600 million (Sanders & Akca, 2020). Likewise, during the 2023 National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) process, the sale of F-16 modernisation kits to Türkiye was blocked under the influence of Greek and Armenian lobby networks (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

However, restricting Türkiye's military inventories undermines not only NATO's internal balance but also Washington's own security architecture. This situation directly reflects the corruption of institutional, interest-driven logic within American foreign policy. The capacity of lobbies to steer external strategy has deepened the U.S. crisis of rationality.

When defining its interests, Washington now operates not through state reason but through the cycles of elections and donation economies. This means that strategic reasoning has been replaced by political intuition. As Henry Kissinger once observed, we must never forget that "the state has enduring interests and concerns that transcend the election calendar." This is precisely the paradox at the heart of America's rationality crisis. The U.S. administration risks long-term strategic balance for short-term domestic gains. Given Türkiye's geopolitical importance, every sanction imposed on it weakens Washington's global reach.

Why Ankara Matters in the New Strategic Equation?

Türkiye, with its historical legacy and geographical depth, stands not merely as a regional actor but as a pivotal centre in the global power competition. Beyond its geography, Türkiye's diplomatic flexibility and institutional continuity have made Ankara a source of balance and strength in an otherwise unstable region.

In contrast to the United States' ongoing crisis of rationality, Türkiye has developed a consistent reflex to shape its foreign policy behaviour amid regional instability through rational interest analysis, multidimensional strategy, and institutional continuity.

Halford Mackinder's *Heartland Thesis* (1904) argued that dominance over the Eurasian core would determine global power (Mackinder, 1904). Nicholas Spykman later balanced this view with his *Rimland Theory*, asserting that control over the coastal zones would shape global dominance (Spykman, 2017). Türkiye lies precisely at the intersection of these two paradigms—making it not merely a passageway but a decisive space of equilibrium in the classical geopolitical equation.

Today, the power rivalry among the U.S., China, and Russia is once again taking shape along this axis, and Türkiye plays a central role not only geographically but strategically. The growing Turkish influence across Central Asia has become one of the most striking features of this new geopolitical architecture. According to a recent *Atlantic Council* report, Washington's ability to protect its interests in Central Asia is now directly linked to Türkiye's presence in the region. Through the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS), Ankara has advanced not only cultural affinity but also tangible integration in energy, infrastructure, defence, and digital connectivity. This initiative is establishing a *third geopolitical axis* between China's Belt and Road Initiative and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union—with Türkiye at its core (Baez, 2025).

From the perspective of energy corridors, Türkiye remains indispensable for Europe's energy security as a key transit country. Projects such as TANAP and TurkStream are not mere pipelines but the infrastructural foundations of strategic stability (Erdogan, 2017). The planned expansion through the Middle Corridor and Trans-Caspian route will form the shortest overland link between China's Belt and Road network and Europe (Akçay & Changgang, 2023).

However, Türkiye's rising importance now extends well beyond energy transit. The discovery of rare-earth element reserves around Eskişehir has made Türkiye one of the emerging strategic actors in the global technology economy. These reserves are vital for key sectors such as defence, renewable energy, microchip manufacturing, and electric vehicle batteries. As of 2025, Türkiye holds the world's second-largest reserve—694 million tons—after China. On October 15, 2025, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that these reserves would not be ceded to any other country, underlining Türkiye's role as both a producer and exporter in this field (BBC News Türkçe, 2025).



(TUR Presidency/ Murat Cetinmuhurdar - Anadolu Agency)

This development directly aligns with the U.S. goal of reducing its material dependence on China. Currently, the U.S. sources roughly 70% of its rare earth imports from China. Yet in April 2025, in response to Washington's new tariff policies, Beijing imposed restrictions on the export of seven "heavy" rare-earth minerals—crucial to the defence industry (Perera, 2025). If Washington intends to diversify its supply chains, it will need Türkiye. The rare earth agreement signed with Ukraine offers little practical alternative, as nearly 70% of Ukraine's estimated USD 14.8 trillion in critical mineral resources are located in Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Luhansk—regions under Russian control (Feng & van Brugen, 2025). Consequently, Türkiye has become not only a military balancing actor within NATO but also a new geo-economic security axis for the United States.

In the defence industry, Türkiye has transformed over the past decade from a consumer of security into a producer of it. The fifth-generation fighter jet *KAAN*, UAVs such as *Bayraktar TB3* and *ANKA-3*, the amphibious assault ship *TCG Anadolu*, and domestic radar systems have turned Türkiye into an actor that generates deterrence rather than mere defence. Its defence exports rose from USD 1.9 billion to USD 7.1 billion between 2023 and 2024, driven by demand from Europe and the Middle East (Wilks, 2025). This transformation has reshaped the technological balance on NATO's eastern flank. Within the emerging post-Ukraine war security architecture, Türkiye's production capacity has reduced Europe's dependency on external defence suppliers. For the U.S., viewing this capacity not as a competitor but as a foundation for partnership aligns with its strategic interests.

The October 28 visit of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to Ankara—culminating in Türkiye's agreement to purchase 20 *Eurofighter Typhoon* jets—should also serve as a wake-up call for Washington (Rawnsley, 2025). While Türkiye's exclusion from the F-35 program was seen as a short-term sanction, it has become a long-term strategic and economic loss for the United States. Ankara's potential collaboration with French company *SAFRAN* for the *KAAN* engine further demonstrates that Türkiye can secure alternatives independently.

As of 2025, Türkiye possesses the highest operational capacity on NATO's southern flank. With a 4.59% contribution to NATO's common budget, Ankara ranks eighth among member states and seventh in personnel contribution to the NATO command structure. These indicators confirm that Türkiye has evolved from a regional player to a net security producer on an alliance-wide scale.

From the U.S. perspective, this reality yields two key outcomes. First, Türkiye's defence capabilities reduce Washington's operational burdens within NATO. Second, they provide the U.S. with a new opportunity for "technological balancing" against Russia and China. The U.S. now competes not only through its own resources but also through the innovative capacities of its allies. Nevertheless, here again, Washington's rationality crisis manifests itself: by excluding Türkiye from the F-35 program, the U.S. forfeited this opportunity through its own miscalculation. According to reports from the Government Accountability Office (2023) and data from the U.S. Department of Defence, Türkiye's removal from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter supply chain forced the Pentagon to relocate the production of nearly 1,000 parts initially manufactured in Türkiye, increasing the cost per aircraft by an estimated USD 7–10 million (Yildirim, 2019).

At the diplomatic level, Türkiye has established a unique role in the international system as a mediator and stabiliser in crisis management. The Black Sea Grain Initiative stands as a tangible example of Türkiye's neutral mediation capacity. Likewise, Ankara's pivotal role in Sweden's NATO accession demonstrated its strategic flexibility within the alliance. In this regard, Türkiye has developed a multidimensional diplomacy model that transcends traditional bloc politics.

Ankara remains the only NATO member capable of maintaining constructive dialogue simultaneously with the West, Russia, China, Iran, and the Gulf states. Therefore, Washington must base its Türkiye policy not on the narrow confines of lobbying pressures but on the broad perspective demanded by strategic rationality. This approach will not only shape bilateral relations but also determine the sustainability of America's claim to global leadership.

The window of opportunity that Türkiye's strategic potential presents to the U.S. has recently reemerged—most visibly through the renewed channel of personal diplomacy between Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.



(TUR Presidency/ Mustafa Kamaci - Anadolu Agency)

Trump's Diplomacy with Türkiye

Since his first presidency, Donald Trump's governing style has made the crisis of rationality in American foreign policy more visible.

Approaching statecraft with a businessman's mindset, Trump abandoned the ideological alliance policies of the Bush, Obama, and Biden administrations and instead foregrounded a *cost-benefit partnership model*. Yet this approach also weakened the capacity for long-term institutional foresight and strained relations with allies. The shift in Washington's attitude toward the war in Ukraine, in particular, has blurred perceptions of U.S. global leadership. Under Joe Biden, the rhetoric of collective solidarity gave way under Trump to a form of *negotiated realism*, generating a crisis of trust among America's allies.

Trump's emphasis on personal diplomacy is closely aligned with Türkiye's traditional practice of "leader diplomacy." During Trump's first term, the direct communication channels he established with President Erdoğan occasionally enabled Türkiye to bypass the lobby-driven barriers within the U.S. bureaucracy. However, since this form of diplomacy relied more on political exchange than on structural trust-building, it failed to produce lasting institutional outcomes.

At the same time, relations between Washington and Ankara during Trump's first presidency were tested by a series of crises. The sanctions imposed following the 2018 Pastor Brunson affair caused a sharp depreciation of the Turkish lira and ushered in a period of eroded trust between the

two countries. The subsequent S-400 missile defence dispute, Türkiye's removal from the F-35 program, and the imposition of CAATSA sanctions carried the relationship into a state of structural tension (İleri, 2021).

Moreover, U.S. support for the YPG in northern Syria deepened Türkiye's structural mistrust of Washington's security posture. Concurrently, economic disputes such as the Halkbank case overshadowed areas of strategic cooperation. As a result, the Trump era became characterised by the overlap of personal diplomacy and institutional friction—where short-term pragmatism replaced long-term strategic confidence (İleri, 2021).

In Trump's second presidency, his warm gestures and personal messages toward Erdoğan continued. The meeting between the two leaders at the White House on September 25 and their encounter at the Sharm El-Sheikh Peace Summit in Egypt on October 13 demonstrated the Trump administration's willingness to cooperate closely with Türkiye (Republic of Türkiye Presidency Directorate of Communications, 2025a; 2025b).

However, it would be reductive to explain Trump's interest in Türkiye solely in terms of personal rapport. This interest stems from material and strategic logic. Trump's "economic nationalism," formulated during his presidency, sought to break U.S. dependence on Chinese supply chains. However, the largest reserves of rare earth elements—essential for artificial intelligence, precision weaponry, and renewable energy technologies—are located in China.

In the 2017 *National Security Strategy*, the Trump administration identified critical minerals for the first time as “vital elements for national defence and economic vitality,” incorporating rare earth elements (REEs) into the U.S. national security discourse (The White House, 2017). This policy was not merely reactive but reflected an economic projection aligned with the interests of America’s technology elite. It was this convergence that earned Trump the support of Peter Thiel during the 2016 presidential election and of Elon Musk in 2024.

At this juncture, Türkiye—with its 694 million tons of rare earth reserves—occupies a critical position in the strategic equation (BBC News Türkçe, 2025). As both a reliable NATO ally and a potential alternative supply hub to China, Türkiye represents an indispensable partner for the United States.

Additionally, Ankara offers advantages across multiple dimensions: cost efficiency in defence production, geographic centrality in the energy transition, and a proven capacity for mediation. During a period in which Trump

has continued to emphasise “burden sharing,” the integration of Türkiye’s defence production capacity into NATO frameworks would serve not only U.S. interests but also regional stability. Türkiye’s pragmatic pursuit of balance in its Middle East, Black Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean policies could form a parallel strategic rationality to Trump’s “America First” philosophy rather than contradict it.

Nonetheless, the greatest risk in this process lies in institutional uncertainty. Continued lobbying pressure on Congress may slow progress along the Ankara–Washington line. Moreover, Türkiye’s humanitarian stance regarding Israel’s war in Gaza has intensified anti-Turkish initiatives among pro-Israel lobby groups.

In this context, the Trump administration must define the future of Türkiye–U.S. relations not through ideological affinity but through the optimisation of mutual benefit. Meeting Türkiye’s strategic expectations within an “investment–return” framework is imperative for the United States. Establishing a clear roadmap in this regard is essential.

Conclusion

The fundamental dilemma of American foreign policy today is no longer one of capacity but of coherence. The “crisis of rationality” facing Washington is, in Habermas’s terms, the crisis of a system that masters its instruments but loses its ability to generate purpose. At the root of this crisis lies the replacement of state reason by lobbying networks. The policy process—driven by defence, energy, and financial circles—has replaced strategic reasoning with the reflexes of interest groups. The CAATSA sanctions, Türkiye’s exclusion from the F-35 program, and the pressure of pro-Israel, Armenian, and Greek lobbies in Congress are among the clearest examples of how the United States has lost its axis of rationality. While lobbying interests have produced short-term political gains, they have simultaneously eroded the American state’s long-term strategic capacity.

In this context, Türkiye emerges not as a symbolic antidote, but as the definitive case study in the cost of American irrationality. Türkiye’s assets—its rare earth reserves, defence production capacity, and pivotal geography—directly address stated U.S. strategic ends: reducing dependency on China, bolstering NATO, and ensuring energy security. By constraining Türkiye through sanctions, the United States is in fact narrowing its own strategic space. Türkiye’s removal from the F-35 supply chain—an irrational reflex born of defence lobbying—has added an estimated

USD 7–10 million in additional costs per aircraft. Likewise, the CAATSA sanctions have pushed Türkiye to diversify its production and supply channels, weakening Washington’s leverage. Today, Ankara is reinforcing its strategic autonomy through its Eurofighter Typhoon deal with the United Kingdom and by exploring alternative engine options for the KAAAN fighter jet, such as cooperation with France’s SAFRAN. The relationship embodies the core paradox of the rationality crisis: the U.S. is employing counter-productive means that frustrate its own ends.

For Washington to break this vicious cycle, it must first move beyond the reflexive domain defined by lobbying interests. Breaking this cycle requires the United States to restore state reason to the core of its strategy. The emerging global order, shaped by China’s rise, demonstrates that hegemony is no longer determined by military might alone, but by the capacity for rational, strategic governance. For Washington, the partnership with Türkiye is a litmus test. By moving beyond the constraints of parochial interests and embracing a rational partnership, the U.S. can begin to reclaim not just power, but the intellectual coherence necessary to lead in the twenty-first century. For in this new era, hegemony belongs not to those who wield the most power, but to those who govern it most rationally.

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