

# THE DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERS OF TURKEY IN WORLD WAR II

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## Abstract

The years between 1939 and 1945 corresponded with the Second World War, an extremely destructive period in which the countries of the world were subject to disintegration into the Allied and Axis Powers. Against the rise of German and Italian Fascism, the western democracies of Great Britain and the USA formed an alliance with the communist Soviet Union. Turkey had experienced the trauma of the First World War, had taken on the burden of the Ottoman Empire, which had already collapsed, and had fought the War of Independence after invasion by international forces. The Republic of Turkey was founded on principles in line with those of western democracies but was tired, lacked adequate military and economic resources, and had resolved not to take part in war unless its territorial integrity came under threat, a threat that was realized in the Second World War. Turkish politics were based on the decision to survive by maintaining the nation's territorial integrity.

**Keywords:** World War II, Turkey, Great Britain, Germany, Soviet Russia, Italy

## Özet

1939-1945 yılları, dünyanın kaçınılmaz şekilde Müttefik ve Mihver olarak ayrışmaya uğradığı çok yıkıcı bir deneyim olan İkinci Dünya Savaşı'na işaret eder. Yükselişe geçen Alman ve İtalyan Faşizmine karşı, Büyük Britanya ve ABD batılı demokrasileri Komünist Sovyetler ile ittifak kurmuşlardır. Ancak, Türkiye, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın travmasını yaşamış, çökmüş bir Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun yükünü sırtlamış ve uluslararası güçlerin toprağını işgal etmelerine karşı bir kurtuluş savaşı vermiştir. Aynı zamanda, prensipleri Batı demokrasileriyle aynı çizgide olan Cumhuriyetçi bir ulus devlet kurmuştur. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, İkinci Dünya Savaşı tehdidi ile karşı karşıya kaldığında, yorgun, askeri ve ekonomik kaynakları yetersiz ve kesinlikle ulusal toprak bütünlüğü tehdit edilmedikçe bir sıcak savaşa girmeme kararlılığındadır. Türk siyasetinin temelinde, ulusal toprak bütünlüğünü koruyarak yaşamını sürdürme kararlılığı vardır.

**AnahtarKelimler:** İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Türkiye, İngiltere, Almanya, Sovyet Rusya, İtalya

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Between the years of 1939 and 1945, World War II created a new paradigm of political dynamics and realities. World War II was by far the most devastating, traumatic, and violent of all wars, even compared to World War I. In particular, the Second Great War forced the states at the core of boiling Europe to pursue new strategies in the international arena. As the war expanded and even the farthest periphery was threatened, it intensified into a World War. The minor and comparatively insignificant or weaker states helplessly strived to preserve their sovereignty by resorting to whatever international maneuvers they could implement: some formed alliances with the warring parties, while others signed treaties of mutual assistance and friendship.

Situated at the geo-political and geo-strategic center of the world, Turkey, some fifteen years after World War I, found herself in a multilateral dilemma. Just as she was organizing as a new republic after being founded in 1923, Turkey was yet again on the razor's edge; she was forced to make the crucial but possibly fatal decision between remaining fully neutral like Switzerland, developing some internationally acceptable discourse to maintain a form of neutrality, or establishing some type of alliance with the warring states.

The relations between Turkey and the Allies, particularly Great Britain, need to be reconsidered from a more realistic perspective because there is substantial evidence that Turkey was a "non-belligerent ally" during the first, - 1939-1941 - and last phases, - 1943-1945 - of the war, particularly with respect to its interactions with Great Britain. By contrast, the second phase of war, from 1941 to 1943, marks a period in which the belligerent parties were mainly balanced.

## **THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

To determine which side Turkey was closer to during World War II, inaccurate understanding of the period during the War of Independence and the subsequent interwar period is needed. In addition, Atatürk's legacy in Turkish foreign policy must be examined thoroughly because the cadres that governed Turkey during World War II were deeply affected by the principles of Atatürk and remained loyal to his legacy. As Cooper describes,

"In many ways, the most significant institution in Turkey is Atatürk himself... The founder of modern Turkey died in November 1938, but his image was quite literally on every office wall and there is little evidence that to suggest that the influence of his views over the political priorities of the Turkish state has weakened. The image of the man remains a powerful symbol of the enduring principles on which he built the modern republic." (Cooper 2002: 118-123)

At the core of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's foreign policy lay the principle of "peace at home, peace in the world," which was his own maxim. The cadres that founded the Republic of Turkey and, notably, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk cooperated closely with Western democracies and based on the priorities of Turkish foreign policy, they aimed to protect the territorial integrity of the Republic of Turkey and the republican regime by establishing good relations with great powers and other nearby countries. In short, during the prewar period, the focus of Turkish foreign policy was on maintaining the *status quo*. Turkey had survived the desired revision between 1919 and 1923 and had remained prudent after the 1930s in its dealings with the countries like Germany and Italy that had requested the revision.

The most concrete example of Turkey's anxiety is the meeting held by Atatürk in 1936 with the English Ambassador Sir Percy Loraine. During this meeting, while they talked about the aggressive and revisionist policies of Italy and Germany, Atatürk expressed his anxiety over the policies pursued by these two countries and suggested strict measures to handle these countries, particularly Italy. The memorandum also reveals that Mustafa Kemal agreed that fascist dictatorships were a common threat to world peace and order (FO 954/28, Microfilm Collection, Document Number: 49, "Memorandum of a Conversation between Atatürk and Sir Percy Loraine," 12 April 1936). Thus, it would not be wrong to claim that Turkey, on the eve of the Second World War, sided with Great Britain in supporting the *status quo*.

#### **TURKEY GETTING CLOSER TO THE ALLIES**

It is obvious that Turkish decision makers had deemed it a mistake to ally with Germany during World War I and did not want to repeat this mistake in World War II. (Güçlü 1997: 77) As World War II erupted, the Turks presumed that the Allies would triumph and had shaped their foreign policy principles around this assumption. However, this information is undoubtedly insufficient for understanding Turkish foreign policy during this period. The aggressive policies of the Axis Powers, particularly Italy, in the Eastern Mediterranean were highly disturbing to the Turkish government and forced Turkey to cooperate with Britain. During the same period, Turkish decision-makers also became extremely suspicious of the policies pursued by the Soviet Union and were concerned about the likely occupation of Turkish territory as a result of a German-Soviet alliance. Furthermore, the expansionist policy of Germany toward the Balkans when the war erupted increased Turkey's prudence toward Germany. Consequently, these developments and the resulting anxiety forced Turkey into close cooperation with the Allies at the beginning of the war. Highly weak in terms of economic and military power, Turkey, faced with the prospect of

elimination, joined with Britain to form a balancing coalition because the threatening Axis powers were stronger. This coalition was established with the Anglo-Turkish Mutual Aid and Assistance Agreement of May 12, 1939, the Franco-Turkish Mutual Aid and Defense Agreement of June 23, 1939, and the Turkish-English-French Declaration of Agreement of October 19, 1939.

Although Turkey developed economic, military, and diplomatic relationships with Britain and France, she acted very carefully to avoid harming relations with Germany. For example, Turkish decision makers defined Germany as a friendly country at every opportunity and never abstained from expressing this view in public. Turkey had strong economic and cultural reasons to avoid a hostile relationship with Germany. From the beginning of the Second World War, Turkey had been developing stronger economic relations with Germany. Furthermore, most of Turkey's leaders, such as FevziÇakmak, the Chief of the General Staff, were in favor of a pro-German attitude. During the 1930s, economic relations between the two countries increased, and by 1938, 44 percent of Turkish exports were bought by Germany and 11 percent of Turkish imports came from Germany. Turkey exported agricultural commodities and chromite, an ore used in artillery production to Germany and imported machinery, machine parts, manufactured goods, and armaments from Germany. However, the volume of trade between the two countries fell by 10-15 percent in the aftermath of Turkey's alliance with Britain in 1939. The Allies were reluctant to purchase the surplus exports, and thus the prices of Turkish exports fell. The increasing scarcity of imports resulted in shortages and the closure of factories. Thus, seeking customers, Turkish leaders sought to revive trade relations with Germany. By 1943, for instance, 28-38 percent of Turkey's imports came from Germany, and 23-25 percent of its exports went to Germany (Vanderlippe 2001: 64).

However, as with Britain, Turkey evaded an alliance agreement with Germany and maintained relations only on the basis of friendship. The first breaking point in Turkey's relationship with Germany occurred in 1939, when agreements were made between Turkey and Britain. In addition, Turkey's termination of chrome exports to Germany and her decision to sell all of her produced chrome to Britain until 1943 played a great role in the deterioration of her relation with Germany.

So, arguments claiming that Turkey pursued a balanced policy between Britain and Germany in 1939 are not well founded; Turkey actually became closer to Britain in 1939 than she ever had been since the proclamation of the republic. For example, the convergence of Turkey and Britain in 1939 resulted in the suspension of all military aid from Germany to Turkey, and on the same date, Britain began to provide significant economic and military aid to Turkey. In addition, Turkey always felt the

immediate Soviet threat, and this threat forced Turkey to return to the traditional foreign policy that had been pursued for almost 150 years since the Ottoman Empire: British political and diplomatic support against the Soviet threat.

Without a doubt, Turkey's perceived threats were not limited to only the Soviet Union and Germany. As mentioned above, Italy was also a threat to Turkey. In particular, Italy's intention to gain naval control in the Eastern Mediterranean and the concessions it claimed regarding the Aegean worried Turkish decision makers. This perceived threat had a great effect on the Turkish-British alliance. Italy not only threatened the interests of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean but also directly threatened those of Britain concerning the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

Despite the cooperation and collaboration established with Britain, Turkey declared her non-belligerency on the same day that Italy entered the war in 1940. However, as per the agreement with Britain in 1939, Turkey was bound to render to Britain and France all assistance in her power. Although some historians and researchers claim that Turkey's declaration caused serious harm to relations between Turkey and Britain, Britain mostly justified Turkey's behavior. The full extent of the damage done by France's collapse was known, and Britain's position in the Middle East and India was threatened; thus, having Turkey as a friendly neutral at the crossroads was greatly appreciated. However, the British also saw that Turkey's position was precarious. On July 17, Major General Cornwall-Evans estimated that the Germans could conquer Turkey and reach the Iraqi border in 16 weeks. Once the Germans were across the Straits, the Turks, he said, could offer little resistance. The British stated that they had hardly expected Turkey to do otherwise when she declared non-belligerency and fully recognized the difficulties in which Turkey found herself. The treaty was valuable as a potential rather than actual asset. It was feared that any other attitude would force Turkey to throw herself into the arms of Germany (Deringil 1982:43).

Huggesen somewhat grudgingly admitted on August 21 that "Turkey at this stage would prove more of a liability than an asset" (Deringil 1982:43). In addition, Turkey generally informed Britain about her decisions in advance, and thus it would be incorrect to state that such an important decision was made without the informed consent of the British government.

What was likely the most important event confirming the Turkish-British alliance in 1940 occurred following the invasion of France by Germany. The resulting question was whether the French defeat would destroy the delicate power balance in the Mediterranean. Turkey was particularly worried about the French fleet: if they were to go over to the Axis, Turkey would be gravely threatened from the sea. Huggesen reported on June 25 that there was no change in the Turkish attitude, and he

admitted that there were two questions that were being asked continually: a) what will happen to the French fleet; and b) are the UK's aircraft strong enough to address the expected attacks? Saraçoğlu told him that if the French fleet surrendered to the Axis, it would be the greatest mistake in history. A Foreign Office minute dated July 1, 1940 and written by Sir O. Sargent underlined the

“Enormous importance the Turks attach to the issue “[French Navy]”. It is in fact, abundantly clear that on the answer to the question of whether or not we are to lose the French fleet, we may be able to argue that it was not our fault. But this will not cut much ice with the Turks... The Turks may well take the loss as finally disposing of our sea power in the Mediterranean, and as depriving us of any value as an ally. It might even afford them the occasion to make terms with the Germans...” (Deringil 1982:36,37).

The Foreign Office was also worried that Turkey would decide that Britain could no longer protect her against Russia and would thus turn to Germany. The Foreign Office wondered

“What means we have of convincing Turkey that it is in her own interest to continue to collaborate with us? ... The first thing is clearly to convince her that if she refuses to compound with Germany and Italy she is safe from being attacked by sea... It all depends, therefore on whether we can assure her that the Germans and Italians will not be able to use the French fleet to establish a complete preponderance in the E. Med” (Deringil 1982:37).

In his explanation of this issue, Selim Deringil stated that “securing Turkey's loyalty was a major factor in the British decision to destroy the French fleet” (Deringil 1982:37), in contradiction with the title of his own study, because explaining the bombing of the French fleet by Britain as an effort in “securing Turkey's loyalty” actually verifies the Turkish-British alliance.

However, in 1940, Germany invaded France and Romania, Italy attacked Greece, and the outstanding successes of the Axis powers on almost all of the frontlines caused public opinion in Turkey to increasingly criticize the government of İsmet Paşa. For instance, even Kazım Karabekir asked Saraçoğlu what the meaning of joining a war on the losing side was, as Italy would join after the Allies were clearly seen to be losing. It would be more accurate to argue that the same anxiety was also deeply felt by the government of İsmet Paşa itself. Thus, it can be concluded that Turkey gradually started to balance Britain in the mid-1940, not in 1939.

### **MAINTENANCE OF INDEPENDENCE**

The first halves of 1941 and 1942 were the periods in which the balanced policy of Turkey was realized in the clearest manner. For example, in January 1941, Britain suggested that Turkey declare war on Italy, which was followed by another request to wage war against Germany if Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were invaded by German troops. This suggestion is thought to have been articulated during a visit to Turkey by British Foreign Minister Eden and General Sir John Dill. However, Turkish decision makers refused to enter the war because of the attitude of Russia as well as Turkey's military deficiency.

Having been both impressed and perturbed by the military success of Germany, Turkey decided to revise her close relations with Britain in 1941 to protect her national interests without frightening Germany, which was succeeding in 1941. Thus, Turkey in 1941 was content to act in accordance with the permanent and enduring needs of the state, which were mainly based on the drive to survive by maintaining national territorial integrity.

The involvement of Italy in the war and the perceivable effects of the war near the borders of Turkey resulted in the creation of a physical survival strategy. At this point, instead of following an aggressive policy to meet the threat coming from the West, Turkey preferred to establish good relations with the states that were potential threats. To this end, the Non-Aggression Pact was signed with Bulgaria on February 17, 1941.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Turkey made it clear to Britain that she would not declare a *casus belli* if the Axis Powers attacked Greece. Britain remained silent about the Non-Aggression Pact signed with Bulgaria but found Turkey's timid statement regarding Greece to be quite odd. For instance, the British had very much tried to convey to the Turkish government that, in light of recent developments, a more positive policy on declaring war than the Turkish government had hitherto followed would best serve the interests of Turkey herself and the Allies (FO 195/2469, File: Balkans, no. 26, Part VIII, 801-900, "Telegram from Sir Miles Lampson to Huggesen," 13 March 1941). However, it was now time that forced Turkey to remain aloof from the Allies. In other words, the national interests of Turkey withheld Turkey from taking action with Britain. In particular, the German offensive in Bulgaria, Greece, and Yugoslavia starting in the spring of 1941 seemed to confirm Turkey's worst fears. Even when Britain offered Turkey the

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<sup>1</sup> From this moment, the word "non-belligerency" was replaced by the word "neutrality." See also FO 195/2469, File: Great Britain - Turkey: Political, no. 2, Part III, 201-300, "Appreciation of Present Turkish position," 20 August 1941. Rothstein explains why some states wanted to be neutral in the following: "One reason is that small powers tend to rely on the hope that they can be protected by their own insignificance. If they can appear detached enough and disintegrated enough and if they can convincingly indicate that they are too powerless to affect the issue, they hope the storm will pass them by" (Rothstein 1968: 26).

opportunity to invade Chios, Mitylene, and Lemnos temporarily, Turkey did not see this as an opportunity and preferred to decline such offers, considering the possible results. The only objective of Turkey was to protect Turkey and the Turkish nation from likely destruction at all costs. Having influenced Turkey for almost two years under the pretext of the German and Italian threats, even Britain lost its power after the letters of good mission addressed to İnönü and written by Hitler on March 4, 1941.

The most intriguing issue is that, after having been allied with Britain against the German and Italian threats in 1939, Turkey started to balance the two great powers surprisingly well on her own in 1941. In other words, being a balancer (or a holder of the balance) like Turkey was another type of role for some states that were located in geographically significant positions (Choi 1995:23).

The role of a balancer is rarely played<sup>2</sup> and does not have much precedent in the balance of power theory and the history of international relations because it is a very challenging method of achieving success. Given such a destructive period in which the world was polarized into the Allied and Axis powers, the ability of Turkey, which neighbors the Balkans, has a coastal border with the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean, and acts as a strategic and cultural bridge between the Middle East, Caucasia, and Asia, to succeed in treating each party equally is an issue that needs to be examined academically and theoretically. At this point, a question arises: "Did İnönü follow a passive and cowardly policy during World War II?" In the coming sections of the analysis, a more detailed answer to this question will be provided. Nevertheless, Turkey's deprivation of economic and military resources in 1941 is enough to refute the "cowardly" criticism. Implementing such a policy during this destructive period would be like an acrobat walking on a tightrope without a net.

The Turks built the balance so skillfully that they took steps to please the British while winking at the Germans. For instance, after the invasion of Bulgaria by Germany, they promised to help the British with Greece but signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Germany in the summer of 1941. Despite all of the efforts of Turkey, the Non-Aggression Pact signed with Germany was enough to frighten the British. A treaty of friendship with Britain's enemy presented the occasion for doubting Turkey's loyalty and impaired the prestige of Great Britain, particularly in the world of Muslims. More and more, Turkey diverted the immediate peril toward their historic enemy, and Turkey demonstrated a tendency to insist that at no time did

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, "Colonel Beck of Poland between Germany and Russia, Tito of Yugoslavia between the West and the East, Sedat of Egypt between the United States and the Soviet Union and Kim Il Sung of North Korea between China and the Soviet Union. All these politicians understood and utilized the environment by trying to hold the balance between the two opposing great powers" (Choi 1995: 24)

they ever regard Russia as anything but their primary enemy (FO 195/2469, File: Great Britain – Turkey: Political, no. 2, Part III, 201-300, “Telegram from Hugessen to Department of State,” 07 July 1941). Moreover, it was the first time that the British called Turkey neutral rather than a non-belligerent ally (FO 195/2469, File: Great Britain – Turkey: Political, no. 2, Part III, 201-300, “Appreciation of Present Turkish position,” 20 August 1941).

Of course, the policy of balance pursued by Turkey during this period had another aim, which is unfortunately not specified in other sources. Turkey’s desire was for Germany to beat Russia and for Great Britain to beat Germany (FO 195/2469, File: Great Britain – Turkey: Political, no. 2, Part III, 201-300, “Conversation between Hugessen and Saraçoğlu,” 09 August 1941).<sup>3</sup> While balancing Germany and Britain on her own, Turkey expected her traditional enemy, Russia, to lose the war. Notably, by the end of April 1941, the Nazis had invaded all of Europe, and the Axis had even entered the islands around Turkey, while Rommel had advanced rapidly in North Africa. Thus, Turkey anticipated being the next target; Germany could attack her in a strike through Iraq and Iran or even the Caucasus. Because Turkey had temporized during the negotiations about the friendship agreement, she had weakened her blockade against German pressure in several ways. Furthermore, Turkey was faced with a crucial situation that threatened the great power within her borders, and she kept her eye open for the weakest moment of the other small states in their region (Fox 1967: 27,28).

Another pair of events in 1941 that must be emphasized are Rashid Ali’s coup, which erupted in Iraq, and the invasion of Iran by Britain and the Soviet Union. These two developments are important to an accurate understanding of Turkish-British relations. In 1941, the German troops were continuously victorious, and the Allies suffered heavy losses on almost all frontlines. Even during such a challenging period of the war, the Allies could not venture an occupation of Iran or Iraq by the Germans. In Iraq, Rashid Ali’s coup, which supported Germany, was repressed within one month, and Iraq was invaded as soon as it was understood that it had fallen under the influence of the Germans. Thus, another question is, when German-Turkish relations reached their peak, why did the Allies leave Turkey untouched? Although this is a difficult question, the answer is actually quite clear and simple. The Turkish decision makers calculated very well when to stop and when to act and repeatedly emphasized the smooth continuation of the Turkish-British alliance. The words of Şükrü Saraçoğlu in 1942 best describe the situation: “Our treaty of alliance with

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<sup>3</sup> See also FO 195/2469, File: Great Britain – Turkey: Political, no. 2, Part III, 201-300, “Conversation between Hugessen and Saraçoğlu,” 18 August 1941.

Great Britain continues to show its results in the interests of both parties. The Anglo-Turkish alliance is the expression of reality itself and constitutes a fundamental factor of the political system which I have just set forth" (*The Times* 1942: 3).

The year of 1942 was also a fluctuating period in the internal and external policy of Turkey. When the British and the Soviets signed the Mutual Assistance Agreement on May 26, 1942, the Turks thought that a secret agreement might have also been signed regarding the future of Turkey. Ultimately, the possibility of the Soviets dominating Eastern Europe scared Turkey after the United States came into war wholeheartedly and joined Britain in supporting the Soviets (Deringil 1989:137). This anxiety caused the progressive animation of anti-Soviet nationalist movements in the public opinion of Turkey. It was believed that in a short time the view of *Pan-Turkism* would materialize with the certainly impending defeat and division of the Soviet Union by the Germans. Ignoring the Turkish government's denied policy of neutrality, *Pan-Turk* publications made requests for Turkey to join the war (clearly against the Soviet Union) that were not always obvious but were certainly meant to encourage President İsmet İnönü to come to aid of Turkey against the Soviet Union (Landau 1995: 112). However, both President İsmet İnönü and the Turkish government approached such calls with prudence. It is true that the Turkish government wanted the removal of the Soviet threat, but as Şükrü Saraçoğlu said, "Turkey has sought no adventures beyond her frontiers" (*The Times* 1942: 3). Moreover, the Turkish government did not reveal any vital irredentist plans (Landau 1995: 115).<sup>4</sup>

October 1942 was another breaking point in relations between Turkey and Britain. Turkey faced increased pressure from the successful counter-offensive of Britain at El Alamein and the Soviet counter-offensive at Stalingrad in November. Turkey had then become a possible means for shortening the war. Because Turkey could not block the Axis' way to the Middle East, she now found herself in a very difficult position. Turkey emphasized her shortage of all essential war materials and insisted that Germany might want to lash out against Britain with a great victory and that Turkey would be an ideal target for such an assault (Deringil 1989:141). Moreover, Turkish participation in the war could serve as a pretext to a Soviet invasion in the name of protection against the Germans (Vanderlippe 2001: 68). Therefore, Turkey again refused to be involved in the war, but the outstanding success of the Allies on almost all of the frontlines triggered the third and last phase of the war, and Turkey became closer to Britain again.

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<sup>4</sup> The crucial exception, as it is said by some historians, was the *Varlık Vergisi*, which was levied by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 11, 1942.

Indeed, there is nowhere clearer than in the body of research and theory that attempts to relate the lasting turbulence of the second phase of the war in 1941-1943. It is evident that if there is a conflict between any nations, there is also a direct relationship between power and victory. Further, rational decision makers are assumed to be able to reach the same conclusion that the Turks did (Siverson & Tennefoss 1984: 1057).

It is true that examining the Turkish-British alliance only in the context of power and victory is not sufficient for grasping the truth of the matter. "The decision to pursue Germany's unconditional surrender alarmed Turkish leaders, who feared that Germany's total defeat, along with the failure of the Americans to extend their strength to Southeastern Europe, would result in the "Bolshevization" of Europe after the war" (Vanderlippe 2001: 68). The Turkish wish for Germany to beat Russia was not realized, and starting in 1943, she once again had to face the Russian threat.

### **TURKISH RAPPROCHEMENT**

In his thesis "Small States and the Balance of Power," Choi states that "with some degree of exaggeration, one might argue that geography decides the fate of a state" (Choi 1995: 19). To some extent, this is an accurate description of the Turkish case in World War II. When a strong power is a sea power, a "block" may lie directly between its territory and that of a land power or merely between the land power and the sea, access to which would bring the land power into conflict with the sea power, as was the case for Turkey during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in World War 2, particularly in the last phase of the war, when Great Britain supported keeping İstanbul and the Straits out of Russian hands (Spykman & Rollins 1939a: 407). It was an extremely difficult task for the British to moderate the endless requests of the Russians about the Straits while trying to convince Turkey to become involved in the war.

The objectives of this task were discussed at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. Churchill came to Casablanca having prepared plans for Turkish involvement. He intended to fully support Turkey by providing military equipment. Safeguarding the southern part of Turkey against any Italian aggression was his second strategy, and having access to Turkish airbases and air space to provide full protection was his third strategy. By the end of the Conference, Churchill had taken what he had wanted so much: full authorization in executing his strategies concerning Turkey. At the Casablanca Conference, the British decided that they must convince the Turks to enter actively into the war by exploiting their fear of the Russians destroying Turkey's territorial integrity after the war.

After the Casablanca Conference, Churchill, armed with the full authorization of the Americans concerning Turkish involvement in the war, decided to initiate negotiations with Turkish authorities. Although Churchill

was very hopeful that his pressure on Turkey would be fruitful, he was also aware that Turkey would not reveal a positive attitude, which would result in a loss of British prestige toward them. Still, Churchill was sure that he would obtain something substantial from the Turkish representatives whom he knew had many reservations.

Wishing to address these reservations, Churchill, in the Adana Conference, on January 30, 1943, told the Turkish President that Turkey would be able to judge for herself any situation that might arise. He added that there might even be a moment in 1943 that Turkey would be strong and ready and Great Britain would have her plans ready. Churchill, however, asked for no engagement, but in his view it was very important for Turkey to be among the victors and to have a seat at the Council that would decide the future after the war and make arrangements to prevent attacks by one nation on another. He emphasized that it was important for Turkey to be among the victors. He stated that Turkey should decide for herself and that the call for a decision might come in six months or in eighteen. He then added that, in 1918, the German collapse had come before it had been expected (CAB 66/34/14, "The Adana Conference: Second Meeting," 30 January 1943, pp. 67 (2) - 68).

Churchill went on to say in Adana that post-war Russia might not be the same as the Russia of former years; it might be even more imperialistic. He also said that the best protection for Turkey lay in an international arrangement, perhaps accompanied by special guarantees to Turkey. Russia and possibly the United States were ready to give these guarantees, he said. He then added that things did not always turn out as badly as was expected, but if they did, it would be better for Turkey to be strong and closely associated with the United Kingdom and the United States. Lastly, he said that he would never propose that Turkey enter the war if she was not ready, nor would he suggest that she should do so in any way that would involve the exhaustion of her resources. The moment, he said, would come when one push would be important: allowing Britain to attack Ploesti from Turkish bases (CAB 66/34/14, "The Adana Conference: Second Meeting," 30 January 1943, pp. 68 - 68 (4)).

In Adana, Churchill conducted negotiations with the Turks very skillfully, and while he induced fear of the Russians in the Turks, he left the final decision to the Turks as to whether to enter the war and managed to conciliate with them. However, Churchill kept his ace in his pocket until the end of the negotiations, when he stated, "If Turkey voluntarily entered the war, she would make the fourth armed power. This would be a great opportunity for Turkey to take her due place and to come to the Peace Conference relatively unweakened, one of the four victorious Powers. That afforded the best prospects for her security" (CAB 66/34/14, "The Adana Conference: Fourth Meeting," 31 January 1943, p. 72).

The Casablanca and the Adana Conferences reveal how important Turkish involvement in the war was for Britain. The impartial stance of Turkey hampered the Anglo-Soviet plans that aimed to end the war as soon as possible and quickly defeat the Germans in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. For this reason, Churchill decided to force Turkey to take Britain's side in the fight. Eliminating all possible allegations that might be used against the interests of Britain and Turkey in the post war era by the Soviets was one of the reasons that Churchill associated with Turkey. Preventing the possibility of Soviet progress toward the Balkans with the help of Turkey was another reason for Churchill's policy (Bilgin & Morewood 2004: 28).

When the Allies began to raise the question of belligerency, the Turks were less perilously situated than they had been earlier. In 1943, the Allies were now gaining the upper hand, and Germany was losing. Nevertheless, dangers remained: "Germany was being defeated in the East by a great power known to be hostile to Turkey. The Nazis were still on Turkey's border and capable of inflicting serious damage. Furthermore, the Allies were divided as to whether to pursue strategies and tactics involving Turkey and their policies were changing rapidly with changing military events. The post war plans being prepared by the winning partners would certainly affect Turkey, particularly because of Russia's traditional desire to control the Turkish Straits" (Fox 1967: 36).

In addition, Russia sought to persuade Britain and the United States that it was essential to alter the Montreux Convention for a regime that would satisfy Moscow and resorted to different tactics to carry the Straits question to inter allied conferences. At first, the Russians hid their eventual target and pretended that their goal was only to revise the Convention, but they increasingly turned toward the objective of making Turkey a satellite state. When the Russians asked whether the Allies needed Turkey's participation in the war at the Moscow Conference in October 1943, the British replied, "There was no disagreement between them as to the desirability of bringing Turkey into the war" (Weisband 1973: 169).

At the first Cairo Conference, in November 1943, following the one in Moscow, the British gave a severe warning to the Turks that they must immediately join the war. The Teheran Conference of November 1943 marked a turning point in Turkey's positioning. Turkey's joining the war was insisted upon not only by the British but also by the Soviets; the Soviets believed that the war would be finished sooner with the participation of Turkey. This was obviously a Soviet plan to force Turkey into yielding to a common Allied decision (Rubin 1980: 33). By this time, Churchill was also anxious to have the Turks engaged; he took the lead at the second Cairo Conference in trying to persuade President İnönü to bring Turkey in. The Americans acquiesced to this move, although, like some of Churchill's own

compatriots, they thought the chance of Turkey agreeing was small and the advantage not “worth diverting” any effort from more important fronts in Western Europe and the Pacific (Fox 1967: 33). The discussions between Churchill, Roosevelt, and İnönü at the second Cairo Conference, in December 1943, mainly failed to yield any positive results. There were “hard and sometimes bitter discussions, and each maintained his own point of view, but the prevailing feature was an outstanding frankness” (Açıklan 1974: 486).

The minutes of the Second Cairo Conference evidence the arduousness and toughness of the negotiations. Churchill clearly stated to the Turkish decision makers that the Allies wanted Turkey to enter the war on the frontline in Bulgaria. He also added that Stalin had promised to help Turkey if she entered the war. Many political historians who study World War II claim that in the Second Cairo Conference İsmet İnönü used the military deficiency argument as an excuse to avoid entering the war. It is true that İsmet İnönü used the argument of military deficiency during the Cairo negotiations. However, it should also be noted that this argument was not an excuse but a reality. For instance, when Churchill said that the Turks had not taken full advantage of the school and tuition opportunities offered to them and this had affected their ability to absorb the available material, İnönü replied that “when inspecting newly arrived Hurricanes that they were no longer regarded as the most modern. They were in fact out of date. No doubt, imperative considerations had made it impossible to supply better planes. Moreover, the Turks had asked several times for aeroplanes and tanks but these had often been refused” (Department of State 1961: 692-695,713,714). It is meaningful that Churchill did not give any satisfactory answer to the words of İnönü.

Therefore, it is quite obvious that the lack of sufficient armament in the Turkish Army was also a valid reason for the Turks to disagree with their British and American counterparts. We can now return to the question of whether İnönü was passive. In the July 1944 letter written by Churchill and addressed to the American President Roosevelt, he confessed that they could not provide sufficient armaments and ammunition to meet the needs of Turkey if the latter entered the war.<sup>5</sup> During World War II, the British

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<sup>5</sup> By the end of the summer of 1944, the Soviets still expected Turkey to come into the war. When the Soviet Ambassador in London, Fedor Tarasovich Gusev, gave an enclosed aide-memoire to Eden wishing that Turkey would join the war, Eden explained to him that the expected breaking off of relations between Turkey and Germany would at least be a long step toward the entry of Turkey into the war and that once Turkey had committed herself, the British, Americans, and Russians could then consider whether they wished Turkey to take the next step and, if so, whether they were prepared to pay any price in order to induce her to do so. He added that the advantage of inducing her to break off relations was that the Allies could get this at once without any of the long haggling about the supply of air squadrons and war materials and military co-operation, which would certainly ensue if and when they asked

attempted to convince the Turks to get involved in the war and made various promises about the provision of sufficient armaments and ammunition in case they entered the war. However, the aforementioned letter proves that even if Turkey entered the war, Britain would not have been able to fulfill the promises made. So İnönü approached the matter not wisely.

However, for a while after the second Cairo Conference, the British assumed an attitude of unusual coolness toward Turkey. They cancelled their military mission and limited war supplies early in 1944. They warned Turkey in April 1944 that they would impose an embargo like those imposed on other impartial nations if Turkey insisted on sending strategic materials to Germany. The British were not alone in this warning; the United States agreed (Fox 1967: 37). This was the moment that Turkey feared economic breakdown because of her tough resistance to meeting the demands of the Allies. Furthermore, her biggest concern was the empowerment of the Soviet Union, and her main hope of protection against this empowerment was support from the Western Allies, in whose good graces must remain (Fox 1967: 38,39). Thus, the first enforcement of the Allies' wishes came with the cease of all chrome exportation to Germany. The Turks then started to attempt to better understand the Soviets' purposes and to nurture better relations with Russia at the Cairo meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill (Weisband 1973: 228). Thus, a secret organization in Turkey that acted according to the *Pan-Turkist* movement was officially revealed and prosecuted (Fox 1967: 39). To satisfy the Soviet Union in particular, the Turkish Government deemed it necessary to take some precautions to exclude some Nazi sympathizers from official duty. Fevzi Çakmak was forced to resign from the post of Chief of General Staff by İnönü, followed by Numan Menemencioğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Two open letters about the corruption of the Saraçoğlu government written by the *Pan-Turkist* leader NihalAtsız made it possible for the Turkish government to capture all of leading figures of Turkism in May 1944.

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Turkey to actually go to war. However, the rupture of relations would, they hoped, produce an important moral effect throughout the Balkans. He also warned Mr. Gusev that they must face the fact that if the Turkish Government were asked to come into the war, the Allies, in view of their commitments in Italy, would be unable to give the Turks an appreciable amount of assistance either in men, aircraft, or war materials, and it was these circumstances that might indeed lead to disappointing results (FO 954/28, Microfilm Collection, Document Number: 450, "A Briefing Telegram from Eden to Sir A. Clark Kerr," 08 July 1944). Churchill had also written a personal letter to President Roosevelt saying that the British, in fact, had no weapons to supply to meet Turkey's demands (FO 954/28, Microfilm Collection, Document Number: 457, "From Prime Minister Churchill to President Roosevelt," 14 July 1944). Indeed, the British arguments that were used against the Soviets and the Americans corroborate İnönü's words in Cairo.

In accordance with this policy, on March 15, 1944, the *Varlık Vergisi* was repealed, and all related penalties were abolished. Moreover, after the passage of some small German warships disguised as commercial vessels was protested by the British, Turkey agreed that the Straits would be closed to all German ships.<sup>6</sup> Finally, when the Americans and the British demanded that Turkey end all diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany, Turkey made the crucial decision to do so on August 2, 1944 (Hakkı 2007: 59).<sup>7</sup>

Increased Soviet hostility toward Turkey had been readily apparent in the summer of 1944. In July 1944, for instance, the Russians had complained the Western Allies' proposal that Turkey merely to break off diplomatic relations with Germany did not confirm to the earlier agreement at Moscow. It was stated that without Russian consent, the British had broken an agreement and from now on it was not a responsibility of the Soviet Union to act jointly with Turkey-related Western Powers. All counter offers to an obvious announcement of war came too late, and Turkey would be left on its own by the Russians (Fox 1967: 38). In particular, Stalin was also against Turkey having the power to decide upon the closure of the Straits during the threat of war (Macfie 1989: 245). What precisely the Russians wanted regarding the Straits was the revision of the Montreux Convention.

It was time for both the British and the Turks to stand against the Soviet demands. In June 1944, the Chief of Staff of Britain reported that when the war ended, the Russians would be the main land power in Europe and Asia. The Chief of Staff also stated that crucial British strategic benefits after the war could be endangered by the Soviets, including oil supplies from the Middle Eastern countries of Iraq and Persia, British communications in the Mediterranean over Turkey, and important sea communications. Thus, the Chief of Staff deduced that to guarantee the USA's support against such threats in the region, the British policy should be directed (Bilgin & Morewood 2004: 31).

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<sup>6</sup> Early in April 1944, two merchant ships that were likely to be used for the evacuation of German soldiers from Crimea were prevented from departing from Istanbul; in June, German barges that were not armed that had previously been armed were forbidden from entering the Aegean; in the same month, Saraçoğlu took over as Foreign Minister after the resignation of Numan Menemenciğlu, who was suspected of enabling the passage of German transport vessels that carried hidden holds full of guns, mines, and munitions. In addition, Saraçoğlu assured that Turkey would not do anything further to help the Germans (Macfie 1989: 245); See also Fox 1967: 39).

<sup>7</sup> See also (Deringil 1989: 173). Interestingly, Cevat Açıkalın had given the date as February 1944 (Açıkalın 1974: 487). In contrast, Von Papen warned Turkey by saying that, "In very serious terms that such a breaking of relations as is planned under pressure of the United Kingdom would deprive Turkey, finally, of her freedom of action which up to now has been jealously guarded by her as a proud nation. The United Kingdom undoubtedly means that this step shall force Turkey to enter the war, as demanded by Britain, which would bring with it momentous consequences for the country" (*The Times* 1944: 3).

Moreover, the Joint Intelligence Committee believed that post-war Russia would try to preserve the Black Sea as a Russian lake and to control movement through the Straits to protect Ukrainian and Soviet shipping. Only expansion on either side of the Straits *and of the base* controlling the sea routes through the Aegean could guarantee full control. Although the Foreign Office still attributed those ambitions to German propaganda, Molotov had sought those bases in 1940. The opposition of Britain to Russia's desire for bases had been suggested by the Joint Planners and Post-Hostilities Planning Sub-Committee. However, the British were also suspicious about the necessity to Russian security to have such a large territory if she had air and naval dominance over the Black Sea and if Turkey did not have any close relations with any other powers. It was now a contradiction that Soviet passage through the Straits could be confined by the British air and naval bases; however, British shipping notwithstanding, the status of Turkey was threatened in the same way by Soviet bases in Bulgaria: both sets of bases were open to attack (Tamkin 2009: 169,170).

In February 1945, at the Yalta Conference, the Soviet Union started to express its demands about the Straits more strictly. Stalin was now stating that it should not be Turkey's decision to let Russian ships pass through the Straits and that a new system similar to the Suez Canal should be constituted (Macfie 1989: 245).<sup>8</sup>

In response, Churchill explained that Britain sympathized with the revision of the treaty and added that the British certainly felt that the present position of Russia with their great interests in the Black Sea should not depend on the narrow exit. However, he proposed that the matter be taken up at the next meeting of foreign ministers. He also suggested that the Turks be informed that this issue was being considered and that they be given assurance that their independence and integrity would be respected. With regard to the proposal that they immediately inform the Turks of what was afoot, Stalin remarked that it was impossible to keep anything secret from the Turks and that such assurance should be expressed (Department of State 1955: 904,910,916). In the end, it was agreed that the revision of Montreux should be discussed in London at the first meeting of foreign ministers (Bilgin & Morewood 2004: 31).

The other matter that Stalin drew attention to was the admission of states into the United Nations. President Roosevelt proposed that the status of an Associated Nation should be given to only those nations that had already declared war on Germany, and he suggested a deadline, March 1945, for states that had not decided whether to declare war. Stalin approached Turkey's situation by saying that some nations "hesitated and speculated on being on the winning side." Churchill supported Turkey by

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<sup>8</sup> See also Department of State (1955: 903)

saying that if a declaration was made by a large group of uncommitted nations at this time, Germany would be affected morally. Turkey's candidacy would not be adopted with unanimous approval, and he insisted that Turkey had agreed to ally with them at a very troubling time but after the war had adopted an attitude that she would not keep up with modern war; her attitude had been friendly and cooperative, even though she had not taken the opportunity given a year ago to join the war. As Stalin said, if by the end of February, she declared war on Germany, she would be invited to the Conference. Churchill accepted this proposition contently (Weisband 1973: 299-300; Department of State 1955:774).<sup>9</sup> On February 20, 1945, Sir Maurice Peterson informed the Turkish Foreign Minister Hasan Saka of the Yalta Decision that March 1 was the deadline for a declaration of war on the Axis, if Turkey was to be invited to the United Nations Conference. Accordingly, on February 23, 1945, Turkey declared war on Germany and Japan. Participating in the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco and placating the Allies were the actual reasons behind the decision (Weisband 1973:303). Soon after Yalta, the Soviet demands were not limited to the revision of the Montreux Convention: they also sought the return of Kars and Ardahan, which had been ceded to the Ottoman Empire under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and retained by Turkey following protracted negotiations in 1921.

However, the Turks were not deserted, and unexpectedly, almost immediately after the war, the problems between the British and the Turks dissolved. The British Government discussed that the "explicit promises" given by Stalin at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 to respect the sovereign integrity of Turkey were remised by the Russians and forced the United States to make "firm representations" to the Soviet government on June 18. The fear of the Turks of being sacrificed by Great Britain to split up Europe with the Russians into spheres of influence did not materialize. The Soviet purposes were known by the British, and thus the British increasingly supported Turkish interests.

The disagreements between the Soviets and Americans and British about their interests and policies were quickly uncovered at Potsdam in July 1945. "By the time, the Truman Doctrine was enunciated; Greece and Turkey had become the focal point of East-West confrontation." The United States was compelled to adopt the leading role in protecting Western interests against Soviet expansionist aims. These aims were very clear regarding Turkey. Although a "hand with the Turks" was demanded and received at Casablanca by Churchill, now there was no one except the Americans to play this role (Weisband 1973: 316-318).

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<sup>9</sup> For the provisions concerning Turkey, *see* p. 944.

## CONCLUSION

To form any conclusions, however general and tentative, regarding the goal of Great Britain, history must be viewed over very long periods, going back in time to the time of the Ottomans. Indeed, the goal of Great Britain was simple and clear: preventing Russian expansionism. "Within two hundred years, Russia fought no less than seven wars with Turkey in an attempt to reach the Mediterranean by way of İstanbul; but, when Turkey was not strong enough to oppose Russia, England came to her aid" (Spykman& Rollins 1939b: 599).

The historical mission of Great Britain, once again, continued with a greater realism.

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