



BEFORE "UNCLE JOE" CROSSED THE RUBICON: THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE'S PERCEPTION OF THE SOVIET IMPACT ON ANGLO-TURKISH RELATIONS IN THE EARLY COLD WAR ERA (1945-46)

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ABSTRACT

The rearrangement of global politics was an inevitable consequence of the Second World War. As part of this process, even before the war ended, the Soviet Union took steps which would provide a basis for her future policies. Accordingly, it embarked on a war of nerves on Turkey. This new struggle not only affected the relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union but also had profound effects on the relations between Turkey and Britain, which had been officially linked with an alliance prior to the Second World War. While Britain endeavoured to keep what was left of its global dominance, Turkey struggled to stand firm against the threat imposed by an emerging super power neighbouring country. Since the search for support from the United States, which had emerged as another global super power at the end of the war, proved futile for Turkish policy makers, they naturally turned to their British ally. In the light of the above-mentioned, the aim of this study is to evaluate the effects of the Soviet threat faced by Turkey in the early Cold War era on Anglo-Turkish relations as perceived by the British Foreign Office.

Keywords: Anglo-Turkish Relations, The Soviet Union, Cold War, British Foreign Office.

"JOE AMCA" RUBİCON'U GEÇMEDEN ÖNCE: İNGİLİZ DIŞİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞININ GÖZÜNDEN SOĞUK SAVAŞIN BAŞLANGICINDA TÜRK-İNGİLİZ İLİŞKİLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ SOVYET ETKİSİ (1945-46)

ÖZ

İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sona ermesi ile birlikte küresel politikaların yeniden şekillenmesi kaçınılmaz bir süreç olarak ortaya çıktı. Bu süreçte, henüz savaş sona ermeden gelecek politikalarının temelini teşkil edecek adımları atan Sovyetler Birliği, bu politikaların bir uzantısı olarak Türkiye üzerinde bir sınır savaşı başlattı. Bu savaş, sadece Türk-Sovyet ilişkilerini etkilemekle kalmayıp, aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin savaş öncesinde bir ittifak ile bağlanmış olduğu İngiltere ile olan ilişkilerini de etkiledi. Bir yandan İngiltere, kaybetmekte olduğu küresel hegemonyadan kalanları elinde tutmaya çalışırken, diğer yandan Türkiye de sınır komşusu bir süper gücün tehdidine karşı durmaya çalışıyordu. Türk dış politikasını belirleyenlerin bu noktada, savaş sonunda küresel bir süper güç olarak Amerika Birleşik Devletleri nezdinde bulamadığı desteği, hâlihazırda bir ittifak içerisinde olduğu İngiltere'de araması kaçınılmazdı. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Soğuk Savaş'ın hemen başında Türkiye'nin karşı karşıya kaldığı Sovyet tehdidinin Türk-İngiliz ilişkilerine olan etkilerini, İngiliz Dışişleri Bakanlığı'nın gözünden değerlendirmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-İngiliz ilişkileri, Sovyetler Birliği, Soğuk Savaş, İngiliz Dışişleri Bakanlığı.

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Introduction

Disorders disrupt the mental and physical well-being of human beings. Of these, bipolar disorder is commonly reported and it constitutes a public health problem. Obesity and metabolic syndrome accompanying the bipolar disorder are more often seen in bipolar patients than the general population (Tunçel, 2017, p. 150). States, like human beings, show peculiar characteristics in their relations, which shape their attitude towards issues. Although these individual attitudes lay the foundation of international relations globally, they may not be free of defects. These defects ultimately result in local and global disorders which need to be handled to maintain the well-being of international relations. Likewise, the projection of bipolar disorder on history reflects the Cold War, which began immediately after the Second World War as if it had always been waiting for its turn in the course of history. In this new war, people and the states they formed were dragged into bipolar disorder. While the ambition to dominate the world revealed such a greed as obesity on one hand, another companion of bipolar disorder, the metabolic syndrome, was observed as super power ambitions which prevented the countries from adopting their own courses of action in their relations.

When the competition among the states is not regulated, wars break out at times. Even though war acts a means of regulation in the international system, the war, by mistake, is frequently considered as an indication that the system has collapsed. Sometimes, as was the case during most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, war could be tolerated because its catastrophic effect was limited (Waltz, 1979, pp. 195-196). However, twentieth century witnessed the disruption of the world order with two world wars which caused unlimited destruction. This destruction not only cost the lives of millions in the first half of the century but also necessitated the regulation of the world order again and again. States emerged and vanished during this regulation process, which, consequently, evolved the international relations. The Brits and the Turks, who fought against each other in the First World War, found themselves in an alliance in the Second World War. The relation between Britain, a belligerent of the Second World War, and Turkey, a non-belligerent of the war, was shaped by many factors from tricky political tactics to explicitly stated intentions. In addition, the Second World War, as a catalyst of the evolution of the international relations, witnessed the surprising symbiotic relation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Yet, when the end of the war was due, national and international interests of the two countries divided the world into two. This division had profound effects on the relations between other countries such as Britain and Turkey, both of whom sought after a conciliation between their own interests and those of the Soviet Union and the United States.

1. The Dawn of the War of Nerves

One consequence of the war was the better image of the Soviet Union worldwide with Stalin 'Uncle Joe' in lead and, the abrogation of Comintern in May 1943 was considered as a proof that Soviet Union did not wish to expand anymore (McCauley, 2008, p. 40). This provided the Soviet Union invaluable time to intensify its efforts to extend its influence. Contrary to the Soviet resolution to achieve its aims, in the final days and immediate aftermath of the war, the strategy that Britain and the United States were going to develop against the Soviet Union with respect to the post-war settlement was not clear. At the outset, it seemed as if a solution could be negotiated but this did not ultimately happen. This unresolved approach of Britain and the United States concurred with a progressively forceful strategy and demands from Moscow aggravated Turkey's security needs (Yılmaz, 2020, p. 714).

The Soviets had pushed hard to open the second front against Germany from Turkey during the war. By the end of the war, the Soviet demands from Turkey seemed to follow a different path. After the Yalta Conference of 4-11 February 1945, the Soviet attitude towards Turkey became unilateral. On March 19, Molotov announced that the Soviet Union would not renew the 1925 Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality, which would end in November 1945. The Soviet statement underlined that the Treaty no longer met the new situation and required significant improvements. Moscow's move was based on documents of Ministry of Interior dated late 1944 and early 1945, which focused on how best to develop Soviet policies for reform in the Straits regime. It was concluded that negotiations had to be initiated with Turkey. To this end, the Soviet-Turkish Pact was to be terminated in order to put pressure on Turkey beforehand (Roberts, 2011, p. 73). Contrary to the Iranian case, the Soviet Foreign Ministry embarked on a synchronic offensive against Turkey, which would be known as the "war of nerves" (Wolff, 2011, p. 288). On 7 June, the Turkish ambassador in Moscow was received by Molotov. Molotov stated that it would be best to solve outstanding questions between Turkey and the Soviet Union before proceeding to negotiate a new treaty. These questions were: (a) The Russo-Turkish Treaty of 1921. Molotov stated that cessions of territory made by the Soviet Union to Turkey under this Treaty were made under duress and required revision. The territory in question consists of the districts of Kars and Ardahan in North Eastern Turkey, which together with Batum formed part of the Ottoman Empire until 1878, when they were ceded to Russia. In 1918, they were returned to Turkey by the Soviet Government under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Under the Treaty of Friendship of 1921 between the Soviet Government and the Turkish Republic, the incorporation of Kars and Ardahan in Turkey was confirmed but Batum was returned to the Soviet Union; (b) the cession of bases by Turkey to the Soviet Union in the Straits and (c) an agreement between the Soviet Union and Turkey as to the revision of the Montreux Convention (TNA, FO371/48774: R11696).

On hearing the Soviet demands, the Turkish government instantly looked for support from the Americans and the English. However, the Turkish government's search for aid from United States seemed fruitless at the beginning since President Roosevelt's post-war policy relied on the assertion that a balance of power would be established between the Soviet Union and Britain in Europe and, China and the Soviet Union in Asia. He envisaged that the United States would be the balancer. He contemplated a world of several great powers instead of a world where each great power had the same ideology. To achieve this, Roosevelt allowed the Soviets to establish representative governments in their sphere but as he stated in 1944, he "didn't care whether the countries bordering Russia became communized." The successor of Roosevelt, President Truman, did not substantially change U.S. policy after his ascension to presidency (Avey, 2012, p. 169). Since there was no direct correlation between its natural security and the Straits, the American policy on the issue was ambivalent and tactical. The United States believed that it could compromise with the Soviet Union at a certain level where it could protect its national interests in the post-war world. Therefore, the American Government was uncritical for Soviet demands of Turkish cities such as Kars and Ardahan, which had no strategic importance for it (Öztürkci, 2019, pp. 486-487). This seemed like a free hand given to the Soviets by the United States and was immediately utilized as a means to exercise pressure on Turkey.

2. Anglo-Turkish Alliance Re-visited

Britain had a significant military, financial and political role in the region thanks to the imperialism it had exercised for decades. Militarily, it had bases, land, naval and air forces and special relations with the military forces of the region. Financially, the British investments in the region involved financial aid to the countries in the region and

commercial relations established with them. Politically, there were special agreements and British political advisors and directors (Yeşilbursa, 2017, p. 25). Thus, the Soviet threat on Turkey was also a threat on British interests in the Middle East. Turkey was not only an ally but also a key factor to prevent Soviet expansion to the region. Contrary to the dismissive attitude of the United States towards Turkey, Britain pursued a prudent policy on the Soviet threat to Turkey. Beginning from Yalta, Britain exhibited an increasingly solid attitude about Soviet intentions against Turkey. Upon this close interest, Turkey completely founded its reliance on Britain (Bilgin, 2007, p. 59). As a result, the Soviet move against Turkey had its effects on the British side as well. Both the British Embassy in Ankara and the Foreign Office was alarmed by the newly emerged Soviet threat over Turkey. The Russian expansion had not been stopped in Romania and Bulgaria. If Russia could not be stopped in Turkey, too, Britain had to face her in Syria and beyond (TNA, FO371/48773: R11226). Although British Empire had survived the First World War, her role as the prime leader in global politics was transferred to the United States as a result of the economic burden of the Second World War. This meant that Britain was now to obtain the support of the United States administration before she set her foreign policy, particularly in regions such as the Middle East where she enjoyed supremacy of almost two centuries. This was also reflected in British policy towards Turkey. Before the Potsdam Conference took place between 17 July and 2 August 1945, a briefing was presented to The United States President, Harry Truman. In this briefing, it was stated that Turkey, which was located in a region of diplomatic, financial and military disputes, could be saved from being a Soviet satellite with the British support (Erhan, 2009, p. 522). Similarly, the British Ambassador in Brazil reported that the American Ambassador had told him that the Soviet threat against Turkey was only the first step of the Soviet policy to control the Eastern Mediterranean. According to the American Ambassador, this policy had to be resisted. He also stated that the American government had to support Her Majesty's government in advising Turkey to resist (TNA, FO371/48773: R11309). Turkey's approach towards Britain against an expansionist neighbouring country seemed natural due to the British supremacy in the Middle East in the last two centuries. However, this approach adopted by Ankara was attentively followed by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Ambassador in Ankara told the French Ambassador that Turkish approach towards Britain about a purely Russian-Turkish issue had left a very bad impression in Moscow (TNA, FO371/48773: R11318).

Following the defeat of Germany, the British, American and Soviet leaders met in Potsdam, a town near Berlin, to negotiate the post-war picture of Europe. The decisions to be taken in this conference were of vital interest for Turkey, who faced with Soviet demands of a base at the Straits and territory in the East. As for the British Foreign Office, supporting Turkey even without the American support was crucial and Moscow had to be notified about the significance of Turkey prior to the conference. It was now evident that Turkey had consulted Britain about Soviet demands. What surprised the British were the Soviet demands of a base and territory because these were issues of global interest rather than local. In addition, it was agreed in Yalta that the Soviet Union was to consult Britain and the United States before she made attempts before Turkey about issues regarding the Montreux Convention (TNA, FO371/48774: R11430). Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Turkish Ambassador to London met the British Secretary of State, Anthony Eden, on 11 July 1945. After expressing Turkey's determination to fight rather than yield to demands of a base at the Straits and territory, Turkish minister and ambassador inquired whether the Soviet demands were to be negotiated in Potsdam. For Eden, this issue was certainly going to be on the agenda. He also said that current Soviet demands were extreme and that Soviets would settle for much less in the long term (TNA, FO 371 / 48774 R11820).

The Potsdam Conference was held between 17 July – 2 August 1945 with the participation of the Soviet Union, the United States and Britain. One of the critical points on the agenda was the Straits problem. On the second day of the conference, Stalin told Churchill that the alliance between Turkey and the Soviet Union could only be established after the settling the problem between the two countries and added that Turkey refused to return Kars and Ardahan to the Soviet Union and to discuss Montreux. During a dinner on 23 July, Stalin also told Churchill that if a base could not be given to the Soviets in the Marmara, a base in Dedeağaç could also be possible. The Straits problem was also discussed at the seventh meeting on the 24 July but was postponed to a later date (Ertem, 2010, p. 267).

While the Potsdam negotiations were in progress, a significant development in British political life took place. The results of the parliamentary elections were announced on 26 July and, to the surprise of the delegations in Potsdam, Churchill was replaced by Attlee as the British premier (Richards et al., 2014, p. 212). In the Attlee government, Ernest Bevin was appointed as the Secretary of State. On 2 August 1945, the Southern Department of the Foreign Office submitted a briefing on Soviet-Turkish relations to the newly appointed Secretary of State. According to the briefing, U.S. President Truman had said that the Straits should be a free waterway for all and that the security of the Straits had to be guaranteed by the Great Powers. For the Southern Department, this was a return to the Lausanne regime. When the British Ambassador in Ankara reported these points to the Turkish Prime Minister, he seemed to be disturbed by the internationalization and demilitarization ideas (TNA, FO371/48774: R13083). The new picture of the control over the Straits seemed gloomy for the Turkish government. Its control over the Straits had been established by the Montreux Convention only in 1936 and now it was once again put into the agenda of international affairs without its consent.

Although the Turkish Government opposed the internationalization of the Straits, this was the response given to the Soviet demand for a base at the Straits by Britain and the United States in Potsdam. The Soviet objection to this response was considered as an issue to be solved at the Foreign Secretaries' meeting to be held in the future. Another issue for Turkey was that Britain and the United States considered the Soviet demands for cession of territory as an issue to be resolved by Turkey and the Soviet Union. To sufficiently resist these demands, Turkey had to provide supplies for her army and air force, for which she required credits from Britain. The problem at this point was that Britain was ready to supply the military equipment Turkey demanded but did not have the resources to grant credits (TNA, FO371/48774: R13646). The economic turmoil which the British government had been through surfaced once again and this time it hindered an opportunity to help an ally. Before and during the war, the British government was eager to provide credits to Turkey in forms of military and economic aid. For instance, on 27 May 1938, a credit agreement worth £16 million was signed between Turkey and Britain. In addition, as part of the Anglo-Turkish negotiations which took place in September 1939, a military credit agreement of £25 million was signed (Deringil, 1989, pp. 25, 38). However, with the end of the war, resources had drained and British government itself was in need of financial aid from the United States. Consequently, the economic aid trump was no longer available. Instead, it was replaced by crafty diplomacy.

Although reluctant to accept the internationalization of the Straits, the Turkish government was forced to choose the less bitter option. Turkish Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu met the British Ambassador, Maurice Peterson, on 11 August and told him that the Turkish Government was ready to accept the internationalization of the Straits on two conditions. These two conditions were that Turkish sovereignty would remain undamaged and that Soviet attitude towards Turkey would change as a result (TNA, FO371/48774:

R13646). As for the Foreign Office, it was essential to learn what the United States government had in mind about the decision taken in Potsdam for the internationalization of the Straits because the United States had not taken any action (TNA, FO371/48774: R13646). This was just another instance of the American effect on the relations between Britain and Turkey. Turkey had consulted the British side about its decision to accept the internationalization of the Straits. Yet, Britain sought for the view of the State Department on the issue.

The dismissive attitude of the United States towards the problems which Turkey faced with resulted in disappointment on the Turkish side. Unlike the British Government, the United States administration did not seem to take the issue seriously. Washington did not even respond to the 20 August memorandum Turkey had given on the Straits. In addition, the United States did not want to take it into the agenda of the Foreign Secretaries' meeting held in London in September. It was agreed in Potsdam that each government would submit its views on Turkey. However, the United States was late to submit its view. Therefore, the dismissive attitude of the United States towards the Turkish issue resulted in a short-lived Turkish-American approach in the beginning. Turkey, once again, focused on her relations with Britain (Bilgin et al., 2004, p. 38).

Another important development in this period was the termination of the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality on 7 November. Turkish President İnönü described the Turkish position in a speech immediately before this. The day after İnönü's speech, the American Ambassador in Ankara presented the Turkish Government a note on the modification of the Montreux Convention as decided in Potsdam ("Soviet-Turkish Pact ended", 1945). American Secretary of State, Byrnes, said that the offer to revise the Montreux Convention was made to meet the changed conditions and came under four headings. These were that the Straits should be open to all merchantmen of all nations at all times; that they should be open to warships of the Black Sea powers at all times; that passage should be denied to warships of other than the Black Sea powers and that United Nations should replace League of Nations in the Convention. Byrnes also added that the United States wished to participate in the convention as a signatory ("American Proposals for Dardanelles", 1945).

Obviously, the American proposal to keep the Straits open was close to the Soviet demands. Stalin demanded limitless passage of warships whether in peace or war. This proposal was to reset all benefits acquired through the Montreux Convention. Accordingly, the Turkish sovereignty over the Straits would only be symbolic. Although the American proposal was close to the Soviet demands, the Soviet demand to share control of the Straits was rejected (Köse, 2019, pp. 1129-1130).

In Turkey, Soviet demands of a base at the Straits and territorial cession caused outrage in public and the political sphere. As a result, anti-communist demonstrations were held in many cities. For instance, approximately three thousand students from Istanbul University gathered in front of Tan Printing House on 4 December. The shopkeepers and passersby also joined the crowd. There was an outburst during the demonstration and, Tan and Yeni Dünya printing houses were partially destroyed. The students also wrote "Down with the USSR, Down with communism" on the walls. Following the incidence, the Government decided to extend the martial law in İstanbul for another six months on 7 December (Uzman, 2018, p. 127). The Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov suggested Moscow make a statement condemning the Turkish fascism and notifying Britain and the United States that the Soviet Union could take steps to maintain its security. Consolidation of the garrisons on the Turkish border was another suggestion by the Soviet Ambassador (Roberts, 2011, p. 76). On 7 December, Stalin turned down Vinogradov's proposals by a cable. "Weapon-rattling may have a nature of provocation,"

he stated. He clearly referred to the Ambassador's proposal to use military power against Turkey. Stalin also warned Vinogradov to not lose one's head and avoid making thoughtless proposals that may lead to political aggravation for their state (Zubok, 2007, p. 40).

The developments of December in Turkey coincided with the Foreign Secretaries' meeting in Moscow. Availing of the opportunity, British Secretary of State, Ernest Bevin, met with Stalin privately. Bevin inquired Stalin about Soviet intentions on Turkey. Stalin said there were two questions. Firstly, the Straits, which the Turks could close at will. Secondly, there were the provinces in Turkey inhabited by Georgians and Armenians where the old frontier had to be restored. He told the Secretary of State that the talks of war were nonsense and the matter could be settled by negotiation with the Turks or the Allies. Bevin then asked Stalin what the Soviet government wanted. Stalin's suggestion for a solution was the restoration of the frontier which existed before 1921. According to Stalin, the population of these provinces were Georgian and Armenian. As regards the Straits, Stalin repeated his claim for a base. It was agreed that the question could not be settled at the present conference. Bevin expressed his hope that Turkey did not have to continue her present state of mobilization which was due to her fear of the Soviet Union (TNA, FO371/48775: R21419). Bevin's talk with Stalin on the Turkish issue was of course an effort to develop its policies towards Turkey. Although Stalin only repeated what had already been known, his words on Soviet's reluctance to embark on a war against Turkey could have alleviated Turkish fears.

Turkish fear of a Soviet attack sprang from rumours of Soviet troops concentrating in Bulgaria. In October 1945, the joint intelligence subcommittee in London reported in that there was no significant concentration of troops or aircraft in Bulgaria or the Caucasus, which could attack Turkey. In the last days of December 1945, United States Army intelligence noted that such rumours of Soviet troops concentrating in Bulgaria were alarmist. Some insignificant concentration of Soviet troops took place in Bulgaria in early 1946. However, United States military intelligence specialists agreed with Turkish officials that it did not indicate a threat against Turkey (Leffler, 1985, p. 811). Despite such reports and analyses, the security needs of Turkey forced it to continue the mobilization of its army, which only contributed to the economic burden of the country. Naturally, this was an outcome carefully planned by Moscow as part of the war of nerves against Turkey.

The Turkish Ambassador to London met Orme Sargent from the Foreign Office on 22 December to learn whether Turkey had been discussed during the Foreign Secretaries' meeting in Moscow. The Ambassador was told that Turkey was not discussed at the conference since it was not on the agenda. Sargent was careful not to inform the Ambassador about the meeting between Bevin and Stalin because it might have consoled the Ambassador slightly to know that Stalin did not have the intention to attack Turkey. But the Ambassador would have been alarmed if he was told that Stalin had at the same time maintained his claim for a base at the Straits and for the cession of territory in the East. The Ambassador, on the other hand, repeated the determination of the Turkish President, Prime Minister and the Government not to yield to the Soviet pressure and underlined the Turkish policy based on British connexion (TNA, FO371/48775: R21442). The Turkish determination to resist any hostile move by the Soviets may have been the only instrument it had at the time but it served to provide the invaluable time Turkish government needed desperately until Western Powers made a move. Temporising was a successful tactic Turkish officials had utilized during the Second World War against both the Allied and Axis forces. Now, a similar tactic could be handy against the Soviet pressure, as well.

The uncertainty of the Soviet issue forced the Turkish officials to form the big picture themselves. To this end, they intensified their efforts to use the diplomatic channels. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Saka, and the Turkish Ambassador to London, Cevat Açıkalın, met with Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, once again in London on 11 January 1946. Saka, after recapitulating the Turkish determination not to make any concession, said that Treaty of Kars had been freely negotiated between Soviet and Turkish governments as a definitive settlement of the frontier question and that Stalin himself had taken part in the negotiations and drawn the frontier line on the map. Bevin replied that the revision of the Montreux Convention was an international issue but the frontier question was a bilateral one. Saka also referred to a list of armaments requirements which the Turkish Government had presented the year before. The value of the requirements mounted up to 77 million Turkish liras. The problem was that Turkish Government could not pay all this cash and hoped that deferred payment terms might be arranged (TNA, FO371/59239: R745). Turkey had demanded military equipment and material from the Allies to modernize its army during the Second World War. Although this demand was met partly by the Allies, Turkey was still in need of more. The Soviet threat only aggravated the problem. However, the financial bottleneck both countries were going through had a compelling effect on the provision of these materials and equipment. The Turkish government continued to insist on credits by the British side and the British government kept on refusing such demands on fair grounds on its part.

The Soviet-Turkish “war of nerves” occurred simultaneously with problems in countries on the periphery. In early 1946, a crisis was on the verge of breaking out in Iran. The Soviet Union was slow to withdraw its troops from Iran. Mohammed Reza Shah’s government was able to reinstate its rule in north-west Iran later that year by intensified diplomacy and American aid. In Greece, the communist rebel was a real threat to the pro-Western government. After the country was liberated from the German occupation, the partisan resistance evolved into armed opposition against the government. Even though the causes of the chaos in Greece were more of internal nature than external, the United States government was inclined to blame Moscow when they were coupled with the problems in Turkey and Iran (Kayaoğlu, 2009, pp. 324-325). The tangible results of the expansionist policies pursued by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe had only added to the security concerns of Turkey, Iran and Greece. Turkey, on her part, was looking for a primary support from Britain, whom she was formally linked by an alliance.

It was a reasonable option for Turkey to align herself with Britain again. Following the explicit expression of Soviet demands and the end of temporary period of friendly relations between Turkey and Russia in the interwar era, Turkish view on Soviet intentions about future was pessimistic (Athanassopoulou, 2020, p. 700).

It was vital for the Turkish Government to eliminate its image as an unaligned country against the Soviet Union. The ignorance of the United States about the Soviet threat against Turkey coupled with the lack of official support from Britain, which only worsened this image. Once again, Turkish officials sought after British support. On 16 February, Turkish Foreign Minister, Hasan Saka, paid a visit to Secretary of State, Ernest Bevin. The Turkish Foreign Minister enquired whether Britain was ready to enter negotiations for modifying the alliance to bring it into conformity with present day realities. If, however, British Government did not think the moment a good one and wished to adjourn such negotiations, the Turkish Government suggested that a statement in the House of Commons of the value which they attached to the alliance would be very reassuring to public opinion in Turkey. Bevin reminded the Turkish Minister that he had already informed the Soviet Government that Britain had a vital interest in Turkey and that they had an alliance with her. Another point made during the meeting was the

Turkish Government's request for deferred payment terms for armament purchases. Saka was informed that Britain could not meet this request of the Turkish Government in view of their relative financial positions. However, payment in gold could be an option for Britain. Although Saka was doubtful whether the Turkish Treasury could pay the large sum on the nail, they would have to do the best they could (TNA, FO371/59240: R2550). Turkey, on one hand, was looking for diplomatic solidarity and for ways to meet her security needs on the other. The lack of official support from Britain and the United States necessitated this search.

On Turkish Government's request, Secretary of State, in his speech in the House of Commons on 21 February 1946, underlined that the Anglo-Turkish Alliance was still in effect and that he wished to see Turkey as a truly independent state, not a satellite state. This move by the British Government was welcomed in Turkey. Afterwards, he was referred as "Father Bevin" in Turkey.

3. American Intervention

In addition, there were several developments in this period which alleviated the isolation sentiment of the Turkish Government. Firstly, the Security Council successfully solved the dispute between the Soviet Union and Iran. Secondly, there were signs of explicit interest on the American side as expressed by the United States Ambassador to Ankara, Edwin C. Wilson, on 11 February. This was followed by the assurances by Byrnes (Bilgin et al., 2004, p. 43).

The support expressed by the American Ambassador to Ankara and the Secretary of State was no coincidence. In fact, a change in the American policies on the Middle East, and on Turkey in particular, was in the making. In an undated report issued by the United States Department of State, the American policy on the Middle East and on Turkey was clarified. Accordingly, the Soviet Union seemed determined to break the British structure. As a result, the power and influence of Moscow could be extended to the Mediterranean over Turkey and the Straits and, to the Indian Ocean over Iran and the Persian Gulf. In the last five years, two barriers before the Soviet extension were eliminated. These were Germany in the west and Japan in the east. The developments in the Near East were only the evidence of the intense efforts by Moscow to eliminate the third barrier in the south. The American policy in this region was to follow an open door policy. Only small steps had been taken in setting the American policy in the Near East. Of course, the USA did not have the intention to use power in order to impose its policies. On the other hand, the region was in need of the American financial power. However, only little help was provided. In fact, the Near East issue was enough to cause a war (Koçak, 2012, p. 257). At this point, the Soviet threat on Turkey seemed to be a problem which needed urgent attention by the American Government. This would have crucial implications on the progress of the Soviet-Turkish relations in the short term.

The firm stand of the Turkish Government against Soviet demands continued after the explicit support of the British Government. At a large party given by the Secretary General for the Iraqi delegation, Turkish Prime Minister, Saraçoğlu, had a talk with the Soviet Ambassador, Vinogradov. Saraçoğlu told the Ambassador that if he could assure Turkey that the Soviet Union wanted nothing from Turkey, the Turkish Government would be happy to talk. Saraçoğlu also added that no progress could be made until Moscow dropped her claims on Turkey (TNA, FO371/59240: R4436). Even though the declaration of Turkish determination was no breaking news, the tone of Turkish statements was now bolder thanks to the slow but promising improvement in British and American support.

Of course, the American tendency towards a support to Turkey was a most necessary addition to that of the British government. On another occasion, the change in

American attitude towards Turkey was clearly observed. On 15 April 1946, the American warship, Missouri, brought the body of the late Turkish Ambassador to the United States, Mehmet Münir Ertegün, to İstanbul. This was interpreted as a sign that the United States was ready to protect Turkey (Aydın, 2000, p. 108). On confirming the symbolic value of the American warship's visit, the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean of the British Navy wished to pay an official visit to İstanbul to offset the cruise of Missouri (TNA, FO371/59242: R9823). However, this demand was turned down in view of the present situation with the Soviets (TNA, FO371/59243: R11072).

In June, Foreign Office reported an apparent slackening of Russian pressure on Turkey both in regard to the question of the Straits and in regard to Russian territorial claims to areas of North Eastern Turkey. However, Foreign Office also noted about the probable resumption of Russian pressure sooner or later (TNA, FO371/59242: R9174). The change in the Soviet attitude was confirmed by the Yugoslav Ambassador in Ankara, who, in conversation with the Turkish Ambassador in Belgrade, told that Russia had no territorial demands on Turkey and only wanted ensure real freedom of the Straits (TNA, FO371/59242: R10645).

Despite the détente of the Soviet attitude towards Turkey, the Soviet demands, which had been voiced unofficially until then, were made official in the summer of 1946. On 7 August, the Soviet Union sent a note to Ankara for the revision of Montreux Convention. Criticizing the Turkish management of the Straits during the war, the Soviet note demanded the Straits should: (i) always be open to merchant shipping; (ii) always be open to the warships of Black Sea powers; (iii) be closed to the warships of non-Black Sea powers, except in special circumstances; (iv) be under the control of Turkey and other Black Sea powers; and (v) be jointly defended by the Soviet Union and Turkey (Roberts, 2011, p. 77).

The note sent to Ankara by Moscow was only the official declaration of the war of nerves and had its effects not only in Turkey but also in Britain and the United States, whose policies had begun to change. The first response to the Soviet note came from the United States. Following a series of high level meetings, a memorandum was presented to the president by the officials of the army and the navy. The memorandum proposed that the United States should resist a Soviet attack against Turkey with all means. President Truman was persuaded to follow this policy. Consulting the British, the Americans sent a note to the Soviets on 19 August 1946. The United States agreed with the Soviet Union on the first three points proposed in the Soviet note but rejected the last two points. The Americans rejected the fourth point in the note which ignored the signatories of the Montreux Convention. In addition, they proposed that Turkey should continue to be the sole controller of the Straits and that an attack or a threat against Turkey would be a matter for the Security Council. The British Government responded to the Soviet note on 21 August and stated that London was ready to attend a conference to be held for the revision of the Montreux Convention. Moreover, the British did not want to comment on the first three points of the Soviet note. However, Britain supported Washington in rejecting the other points (Bilgin et al., 2004, p. 45).

The two notes sent to Moscow by Britain and the United States was a proof of Turkey's firm stand against the Soviet demands in the last two years. It was the first instance of the cooperation among Turkey, Britain and the United States, which would not be the last.

Turkey replied to the Soviet note on 22 August. Turkey rejected the Soviet claims about the violation of the Montreux regime during the war. According to Turkey, certain belligerents had adopted new types of vessels which were completely different from those

specified in the Montreux Convention and which technically conformed with the merchant vessels covered by Article 7. The Turkish Government realised that the regulations regarding the Straits were out of date and had to be adapted to modern conditions but it could not admit that that should serve as pretext for rejection of the whole Convention or for accusation against itself. The Turkish Government noted that the first three proposed Soviet amendments were more or less identical with the suggestions put forward by the American Government on 2 November 1945. In replying to the American suggestions, the Turkish Government had stated that it was the business of the international conference of the signatory powers provided for by the Montreux Convention to reconcile the principle of liberty of transit of merchant and war vessels through the Straits with Turkish security and sovereignty; that the Turkish Government would proceed to the careful study of the question and would make known its point of view to the three powers but it could already be stated that Turkish Government accepted favourably the American suggestions which could be taken as basis for discussion; that with regard to American participation at the proposed conference, the Turkish Government not only sincerely wished for this but considered it a vital international necessity. The same reply was now valid for the three proposals contained in the Soviet note. With regard to point 4 of the Soviet note, the Turkish Government could not recommend a new regime for the Straits founded on a new basis in elaboration of which only the Turkish and Black Sea powers were to participate to the exclusion of all others. Point 5 of the Soviet note amounted to a joint Turkish/Soviet defence of the Straits against an attack from the Mediterranean. From a national point of view, the Soviet proposal was not compatible with Turkish rights of sovereignty nor with her security (TNA, F0371/59243: R12533).

On 24 September, the Soviet Union replied with a second note of similar content. Claiming that the Black Sea was an inland sea and that Turkey had accepted to set the status of the Straits in cooperation with the Black Sea powers by 1921 Treaty, the Soviet Government argued for the 4th point and insisted on the 5th point. The second Soviet note was also replied firstly by the United States and Britain on 9 October. This was followed by the Turkish reply on 18 October. Turkey sent its reply to all signatories of the Montreux Convention except Japan (Tellal, 2009, p. 505).

The Soviet Union did not reply the Turkish note of 18 October and, although the Soviet diplomats in Ankara suggested Moscow continue the war of nerves on Turkey, the Straits crisis ended shortly. For the Western historians of Cold War, the reason why Stalin moved away from confrontation with Turkey was the strong support of Britain and the United States. It is true that Stalin could go further on his demands without such support. However, it was not only the Western Powers that prevented Stalin from insisting on the Straits issue. In the summer of 1946, the Soviets focused on negotiations with the Western Powers about peace treaties with Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Romania. These treaties were of vital importance for Moscow regarding the consolidation of its position in Eastern Europe. Another issue on the agenda of the Council of Foreign Ministers was the peace treaty to be concluded with Germany. Stalin and Molotov were obsessed about the rise of Germany once again and they adhered to the joint application of decisions taken in Potsdam regarding the denazification, demilitarization and democratization of Germany (Roberts, 2012, pp. 109-110).

Conclusion

In 49 BC, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River to claim what he believed was his, the rule of Rome. Almost two millenniums after this drastic move, Stalin embarked on a similar quest. Alarming the rest of the world, he even came to terms with one of his worst enemies, Hitler, to achieve his goal. The short interval when he grabbed control of several East European territories through this pact ended with the futile German attack.

Afterwards, the alliance formed with the Western Powers against a common enemy not only helped the Soviet Union survive but also contributed to Stalin's determination to conquer more in the turmoil of the post-war era. American administration's delay in confirming Stalin's post-war ambitions was the missing piece for Stalin to complete the puzzle of communist influence on the periphery. As for the Turkish government, this delay could have been a negligible point in the course of history if Stalin had not demanded mutual control over the Straits and sovereignty over the Eastern territories of Turkey. The bilateral relations between the two countries evolved into a multilateral phase with the inclusion of the British government, who realized the Soviet danger well before its American counterpart. Thus, the Anglo-Turkish alliance formed at the beginning of the Second World War entered a new phase with the Soviet threat, which entailed a possibility to cause damage on the national benefits of both countries. The Soviet expansionism to the south could only be interpreted as a threat to the British interests in the Middle East by the Foreign Office after most of the Balkans fell under the Soviet control. As a result, Soviet demands from Turkey over the control of the Straits grew into an urgent issue. The urgency of the situation increased with the Turkish government's search for support from Britain. Initially, this support was unofficial and the British government remained non-committal. However, with the involvement of the American administration in the issue after confirming the expansionist aims of Moscow, British government took its position by Turkey publicly. It was inevitable that the two poles of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union, were to be the determiners of this new phase of Anglo-Turkish relations. Both Britain and Turkey were in need of American aid to recover from the heavy burden caused by the Second World War. As this need was exacerbated by the Soviet threat, both countries sought for ways to develop further relations with the leader of the Western Block, which, in turn, shaped their bilateral relations at the dawn of the Cold War. And when President Truman made his historic speech at the Congress on 12th March 1947 to warn about the danger of communism, the Rubicon for Stalin was officially set.

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