

DETERMINANTS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY, 1918 - 1945: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Significant socio-political and economic events in the lives of nations and groups occur within the framework of historical and geographical determinants at work, together with the systemic and subsystemic factors that impinge upon them. Often, the domestic linkage of foreign policy and the impact of foreign policy on domestic politics are too closely intertwined and, therefore, can not be sharply and clearly delineated. The geographic locations and the historical experiences of nations mold into forms, norms, and traditions, producing national cultures. Expansion of a culture or its collaboration with other cultures produce similar or synthetic patterns of life, frame of mind, and a general in the formation of events.

As the domestic and foreign determinants of Turkish foreign policy between 1918 and 1945 are being identified and analyzed, the above explanation must be kept in mind. The various determinants, also, should be analyzed within their historical context. Here, we focus attention on the basic issues of the Turkish foreign policy within a given time period, through a historical framework.

To understand the present, we must attempt to understand its historical roots. We must understand, analyze, and interpret current events within the context of history. In this article, the primary attention is given to the background of the events influencing the Turkish political perceptions and to the pressures and roles of the various actors in the domestic and external arenas.

Turkish domestic politics has been classified into three time-periods: first, from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Turkish Republic; second, the Ataturk era; and third, the Inonu era. Domestic politics in these periods has been analyzed within the context of systemic and subsystemic changes, carrying the events from the end of World War I to the end of World War II. Additionally, an effort has been made to link relevant foreign events at the systemic levels with Tur-

kish domestic politics and events. Similarly, Turkey's domestic considerations and their effect on foreign policy decisions have been given due attention.

Issues and determinants are grouped in two major categories: domestic and international, each affecting the other through a number of linkages of events and issues.

By the end of 1918, the socio-political conditions of the Turks in the Ottoman Empire were most depressing and devastating. Entering the war as an ally of Imperial Germany, the Ottoman Empire, simultaneously, fought at many fronts, exhausting its forces, manpower, and other essential resources. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire meant a total loss of its extended territories. The Ottoman defeat in World War I, also, caused a temporary loss of a portion of Turkish homeland to the victorious powers and their non-Turkish allies in the Ottoman Empire, such as the Armenians, Greeks, Kurds and the Arabs.

Such catastrophes as the enslavement of its government, the military occupation of its capital, and the disarming of most of its armed and police forces were the lesser of the Empire's worries when its very existence and independence were at stake. Its foreign policy, if there was anything left to be called foreign policy, was merely to try to soften the brutal blows directed at its existence. The primary goal was to find ways and means for national survival. The years following 1918 and the signing of the Mudros and the Sevres agreements, the once mighty Ottoman Empire with its multireligious and multi-racial composition was being reduced to a pale-shadow of its former-self.

We must subdivide the period after 1918 into smaller time slices, since the flow of events and the speed of change occurred more rapidly during this period. Thus, these subdivisions would allow us to take a closer look at the changes that would transform the Turkish nation. During the 1918-1923 period, the Turks fought for and won the war of independence against the European and Greek occupation forces.¹

The war of liberation period was followed by the era of civilian rule and reforms introduced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during 1923-1938.

¹ Geoffrey Lewis, *Turkey* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 19552), pp. 52-74.

This was an era of reconstruction, social, economic, political and various other reforms. It was a race for modernization in the context of Western civilization, with a late start of a hundred years, if not more.

The 1939-1945 period was the Inonu era and that of the Republican Party that held a monopoly of political power until it was ousted at the polls in 1950. In foreign affairs, this period witnessed the atrocities and high casualties of World War II and the start of the Cold War.

A. The 1918 - 1923 Era

While the issues during the 1918-1923 period were related to the struggle for survival as a nation, as a viable political unit, and to the maintenance of independence of the Turkish people, the determinant of the period were political and military defeats and the collapse of an extensive political system.²

The, bitter, and often simultaneous struggles that ensued during after World War I left the Turks in a state of distrust and cynicism of most foreign powers and peoples. "Xenophobia" was often used by foreign observers of the Turkish scene, to describe the state of mind of the Turkish people during this period of their history. Although the war, internal revolts, and conspiracies had left the Turks bitter and caused them to be cynical, they did not either become pessimistic or desperate about their own future. If anything, external pressures and internal struggle awoke in the Turkish people the long-dormant spirit of self-reliance and perseverance, the characteristics that had made their forefathers the creators and rulers of one of the greatest empires in human history. Notwithstanding the overwhelming domestic and foreign policy problems they faced, the Turks remained unyielding in their determination to remain free and independent of foreign yoke in their Anatolian and Thracian homeland.

After having expelled the foreign invaders-some by force and others by negotiations-from the Turkish homeland, the Turks, under the intrepid leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, implemented radical social and political reforms that laid a firm foundation for a republican system of government in the country.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 114-130.

B. The 1923-1938 Era

The 1923-1938 era was a period of rapid and radical changes brought about in the name of “revolutionism”. During this period, the Turkish policies were based on a set of principles popularly known as the Six Arrows. These principles were:

Republicanism and Nationalism signified the concept of citizenship equality and devotion to territorial nationalism rather than to religion or race, as had been the case under the Ottoman rule.

Populism repudiated class privileges, class struggle, and abuses of capitalism. It symbolized equality of each individual under the law.

Etatism stood for a constructive and productive intervention of the state in the national economy.

Secularism separated religion from state affairs.

Revolutionism provided the Turks with a dynamic political principle that allowed them to introduce radical changes, when deemed necessary.³

The Turkish revolution, indeed, belongs to Atatürk because it was he who precipitated a radical transformation of Turkish society. He delivered the *coup de grace* to a number of religious and political institutions some of which, long ago, had become irrelevant to the socio-economic and political needs of the people. In other words, the traditional assumptions and theory of social intercourse no longer proximated reality. Thus, the traditional theory had to be abandoned or modified, to satisfy the needs of the community, if the latter were to foil the challenges posed by the internal dissensions and external threats of humiliation and national disintegration. In the face of a military defeat in 1917-1918 and other seemingly insurmountable obstacles to its political existence, Turkey's survival as an independent and a sovereign state is a living proof of Atatürk's genius as an impeccable, a political and military strategist of the first order, and the resuscitator of a “sick and dying” nation.

All revolutionists claim that their programs, if properly executed, would usher in a new, glorious, and progressive era whose infra-structure

³ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 234-287.

could be built only on the ashes of the existing system, which in their view, had inflicted grievous iniquities and injustices upon the people. To such claims, Ataturk was no exception. He, too, blamed the established system for all the social and political maladies the nation suffered. However, unlike some other revolutionaries, Ataturk was careful not to challenge simultaneously all the beholders of power in the traditional system of the *ancien regime*. He consolidated his power gradually and with cautious deliberations. This stage of the changes he introduced might be called "revolution in being".

In the process of inducing changes, the first revolutionary step by Ataturk was in the direction of a psychological transformation of the Turkish nation. The first step manifested itself in the Turkish Nationalists refusal to accept the Western-dictated treaty of Sevres and in their willingness to abdicate leadership of the *Umma*, the entire Muslim community, a role traditionally assigned to the Khalife. This psychological transformation has been recognized by Bernard Lewis in the following quotation:

"The Turks are a people who speak Turkish and live in Turkey.... The introduction and propagation of this idea in Turkey, and its eventual acceptance by the Turkish people as expressing the nature of their corporate identity and statehood, *has been one of the major radical and violent break with the social, cultural, and political tradition of the past.*" (italics added)

Thus, the psychological transformation and acceptance of a new outlook was and remains to be one of the most significant determinants of Turkish domestic and foreign policies.

This, however, should not be construed to mean that the political and social changes were subordinate to the psychological change initiated by the Kemalist revolution. Rather, what it does mean is that without a successful psychological revolution, other changes would have been ephemeral. It was both a messianic revolution that fed itself on abhorrence and contempt for the foreign enemies and, it was an inward looking revolution inspired and nourished by the inherent spirit of independence and freedom of the Turkish people.

Briefly, one might say that only secularism, republicanism, and populism could be construed as revolutionary concepts decreed by the Kemalist revolution in Turkey. We used the word "decreed" advisedly, because

these concepts were popularly accepted neither during the lifetime of Atatürk nor for decades after his demise in 1938. Atatürk himself seemed to have recognized this situation when he proposed that "Those who have grasped the purpose of the revolution will always be able to safeguard it. "Was he suggesting the concept of a continuous revolution in Turkey? The points discussed above remained the determinants of the Turkish foreign policy in the post-Atatürk era.⁴

During the period under discussion, 1918-1938, the international scene, also, was undergoing rapid changes. In this rapidly changing era, the world witnessed the disintegration of three empires which had been active and often key actors in European politics. The disintegration of the Ottoman, the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires engendered, for the first time since the Napoleonic Wars, an increase in the number of actors in the international system. Most of the new actors were politically unstable and economically weak, compared to the victorious powers who had taken a strong lead in the industrialization and modernization of their respective economic and political systems. As a result of their victory in World War I, the European members of the war-time alliance, launched a new wave of colonialism, primarily in the Middle East.

The political indicators of this period were: colonialism; industrialist-capitalist growth and its counter-development, communism; and, the beginning of the awareness of differences between the "haves" and "have-nots." While the European powers were trying to expand their power and riches, most Afro-Asian and Latin American countries were living at a subsistence level; they were trying to adapt themselves to the international political system in the setting of which they played no part and whose rules and regulations they hardly understood.

While both the vanquished and the victors were engaged in the reconstruction of their economies, many of these states were busy rearming and strengthening their military forces, in anticipation and preparation of another impending conflict. For many of these states, the end of World War I was no more than a temporary armistice that was expected to be violated by one of the traditional European rivals for power and hegemony. Thus, while capturing more lands, seizing additional colonial re-

⁴ George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1952), pp. 120-126.

sources, these powers were busy making political deals at the regional and international levels. This *status quo* attempted to legitimize the seizure of additional colonies through an ostensibly international organization which they created. The League of Nations, however, failed to maintain international peace, because of the weaknesses inherent in its charter.

All political indicators of the time were pointing toward more difficult and rift-ridden years to come. There were indicators that signalled an impending disaster of the international economic system and the failure of international communism to attract more adherents to its cause, through peaceful and democratic means.

The world had already entered an era of crisis reflected in such conflicts as the 1931 Japanese aggression against Manchuria that led to the Japanese-Chinese war of 1937; and the Italian Aggression against Ethiopia in 1935. Shaken by such international conflicts, the *status quo* powers of Europe, such as the United Kingdom made overtures to improve relations with Turkey. Since Turkey had no desire to get involved in such international conflicts, it provided Ankara an opportunity to concentrate on domestic issues. First, Ataturk and later Inonu focused their respective attention to support and maintain the domestic *status quo*. The revolutionary surge of socio-economic and cultural changes introduced by Ataturk took place during this period of *status quo* in international relations; whereas a *status quo* period in domestic politics was experienced during the conflict years of World War II.

C. The 1939 - 1945 Era

The years between 1939-1945 were marked by a single-party authoritarian rule in the domestic politics of Turkey and a high intensity of diplomatic activities on the international level. Inonu, the presidential successor to Ataturk, was not a revolutionary leader. Rather, he was a *status quo* politician. Even when rapid change was necessary, Inonu preferred slow and evolutionary transformation. This approach was evident both in the domestic and foreign policies of Turkey during the Inonu era. It should be remembered that most ideas, concepts, principles have their roots in previous experiences and they have strong impact on the behavior of political actors.⁵

⁵ Lewis, *Turkey*, pp. 119-124. An excellent analysis of Turkish foreign policy has been made by Selim Deringil. See his article "Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World

The indicators on the eve of World War II were expressions of cardinal changes in the political, social, and economic fields in the world. For example, the Soviet Union, after going through devastating changes, following the October Revolution of 1917, finally, had started to concentrate its efforts on consolidating its domestic control in the 1920s. It also expanded its power and influence on its rim.

England and France, which had reached the apogees of their respective colonial expansions in the 1820s and 1930s, were quietly agreeing to a "hands off" policy toward their erstwhile ally of World War I. Soviet policies were once again emphasizing the pan-Slavic theme that had previously been a vehicle of imperial Russia's foreign policy.

The United States, emerging from the self-imposed constraints of the Monroe Doctrine and suddenly finding itself in the role of one of the world powers during World War I, had been preoccupied with the great depression of the 1930s and in the efforts of rebuilding her economy. The USA had no time or interest at the time to get involved in the political games of the European powers or in a struggle with any other power beyond her immediate boundaries and the sphere of influence. This left the international arena rather free for a limited number of political actors to dictate political and economic agendas for international affairs during the two decades following World War I.

D. Turkish Foreign Policy at the Systemic Level

During the period under discussion, the analytical framework of the Turkish foreign policy was based on two main postulates. They were:

1. Maintenance of peace, sovereignty, and national development were of the highest considerations, over all other aims of foreign policy of the country.
2. The Soviet Union was identified as a primary threat to the security of the new republic.

Due to these perceptions of the political leaders of the period, İnönü's policies remained "rigidly loyal" to these postulates. There was, however,

War: 'Active neutrality' 1942, On the razors edge." *Turkish Review Quarterly Digest* (Summer 1992), pp. 45-72.

nothing new of innovative about these principles. They were merely the strongest indicators of the lessons learned through time and experience in the previous decades. The first postulate was a manifestation of the Kemalist era; the Inonu administration was merely following the guidelines established earlier by the founder of the Republic. The second postulate also was a continuation of the traditional mutual antagonism between the Turks and the Russian Slavs who had fought thirteen major wars against each other in the previous four centuries.

For Turkey, peace could come only when the Soviet Union would accept the principle of non-intervention in Turkish domestic affairs. Despite threats, inducements, and pressures from a variety of foreign sources, the Turks remained determined to maintain the principle of Turkish territorial inviolability and to exercise their inherent right to remain independent and sovereign in their homeland.⁶

The Turkish government, along with most Turks, identified the security of their nation with the containment of the Soviet Union whom they watched with alarm as it used its military strength to increase its influence and hegemony far beyond its traditional territorial and cultural limits. These developments were creating uneasiness and alarm among the Turkish decision-makers, despite the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey and the Soviet Union had developed close cooperation that provided mutual assistance to Moscow and Ankara in their fight against the Western powers that were opposed to the establishment of a Republic in Turkey and a Communist regime in Russia. The temporary rapprochement in the 1920s and 1930s between Turkey and the Soviet Union could not eliminate the mutual distrust and animosity that had been the rule in their interaction for the past several centuries. Thus, the Turks perceived that the Soviet policies toward Turkey and its neighbors were a continuation of the Czarist expansionist policies.

Within a short span of thirty years, Turkish relations with its northern neighbor had changed from being enemies in World War I, to being friends during the years of struggle against Western powers, and to being watchful neutrals. Just two decades earlier, the Nationalist Turks sought and received Soviet aid and neutrality in their fight against the

⁶ Edwar Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1943-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 33-46.

European and Greek occupation forces in Anatolia and Thrace. During this same period, the Soviet Union needed Turkey's watchful neutrality by preventing the Western powers from using its territory for attacks on Russia and by encouraging the Turkish population in the Soviet Union to remain loyal to the new regime. Two decades later, the Soviet Union had returned to the policy followed by Russia during the Czarist regime. Soon after the end of World War II, the Soviet Union made territorial and political demands on Turkey. Moscow demanded a joint control over the Turkish Straits and surrender of parts of Eastern Turkey to the Soviet Union. Turkey summarily rejected these demands. For its tenacious resistance to the Soviet pressure, Turkey was fully supported by the United States.⁷

During the period under discussion, 1939-1945, Turkish foreign policies were based on two principles: (1) neutrality in WW II and (2) active engagement, in purpose if not in style, in international affairs. Although these principles seemed mutually inconsistent, the Turks managed to resolve the apparent inconsistency in the context of the system transforming diplomacy between 1943 and 1945. The conditions surrounding Turkish foreign policy constrained the Turks to follow a cautious and passive course of action in a highly active political arena. The form and substance of Turkish foreign policy, during this period, has been cited as the best example of small state diplomacy.⁸

The determinant of its policy was its operation code that was basically ideological and reflective of historical events and considerations. "Ideological" in the sense that of the great socio-political revolutions in the history of the modern states, including France, China and the Soviet Union, the Kemalist Revolution in Turkey is unique in the sense that it has produced, unlike the other states, an ideology of peace, popular sovereignty and national development and rejected militant "revisionism." It was a realistic approach pursued by Turkey, because its strength had been sapped by the wars if fought, continuously, between 1911 and 1923, and because of the constraints of the regional and systemic *real politik*. Turkey's reduced power base and resources did not permit it to pursue

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-46.

⁸ Gunther Nollau and Hans Jurgen Wiehe, *Russia's Southern Flank: Soviet Operations in Iran, Turkey, and Afganistan* (Translated by Victor Andersen), New York: Praeger, 1963, pp. 85-92.

Turkish Foreign Policy, pp. 1-6.

expansionist policies. "Kemalism stands alone among revolutionary ideologies in its emphasis upon domestic reforms as opposed to foreign revisionism." In short, the Turkish foreign policy motto was "peace at home, peace abroad."⁹ This principle together with the policies pursued during 1939-1945 would shape both domestic and foreign policies of Turkey in the post-World War II era.

The Turks were trying to stay out of World War II, while endeavoring to maintain their national security and sovereignty, in a region of the world that was rapidly becoming a center of strong interests and considerations of the two warring sides.

E. Turkish Foreign Policy at the Subsystemic Level

The principle "peace at home, peace abroad" enunciated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was more than mere wishful thinking. It was a cautious and realistic assessment of the nation's economic and political conditions that guided Atatürk in the formulation of a non-involvement policy abroad and a policy of rapid development at home. This is why Turkey concentrated its efforts on building up its security and on establishing peaceful coexistence with all its neighbors.

After 1923, when Turkey faced problems with its neighbors or other international actors, it gave preference to solving conflicts through negotiations. Through multinational negotiations at the League of Nations Council in 1936, Turkey was successful in getting an international agreement to make changes in the Agreement on the Status of the Straits, *Boğazlar Sözleşmesi*. This has been considered a "moral" success for Turkey because it was the first state to use legal methods to have changes made in a post-war multi-national agreement.¹⁰

In recognition of the dangers posed by the Italian Fascist regime and its expansionist intentions in the Balkans constrained the Balkan powers in the 1930s to establish treaties with the aim of maintain a *status quo* in the Balkans. Turkey made serious efforts to create a regional defense pact

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-29.

¹⁰ Turkkaya Ataov, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Basımevi, 1965), pp. 4-7. For texts of agreement on the Turkish Straits see İsmail Soysal, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Andlaşmaları* Vol 1 (1920-1945), pp. 140-151; and pp. 493-518.

among the Balkan states. Turkey was the moving force behind the establishment of the Balkan Entente. Ankara also took constructive steps to create better relations with Greece. However, Turkey's efforts failed to convince Bulgaria about the desirability of creating a joint defence pact in the Balkans. Thus, while the Balkan Pact protected the region from a possible Bulgarian aggression, Sofia's non-participation in it left region vulnerable to expansionist moves by stronger powers such as Italy and, later, Germany. The ultimate aim of the Balkan Pact states was to create a union that would formulate and pursue a common foreign policy and a cooperative defense strategy for the Balkan countries.¹¹

These goals, however, remained unrealized. Economic considerations obtained a higher preference over the political/strategic ingredients of policy making. Around this period, the Balkan raw materials found a much-needed market in Germany. The German economic penetration of the Balkans eventually undermined the unity of purpose created by the Balkan Entente and it strengthened Berlin's influence in the region. Turkey found itself in a vulnerable position, because of its dependence on the German market and economy, a dependence that might bring Turkey into a German sphere of influence, a prospect that would be in direct conflict with Ankara's stated foreign policy principles. To avert such an undesirable possibility, Ankara, in 1937, made a reassessment of its relations with Germany. After this reassessment, Turkey's relations with Germany began to cool off. As a consequence of this change in its foreign policy orientation, Turkey stopped making major arms purchases from Germany. By similar other policy changes, Turkey made it clear that she wished to follow a neutralist policy in its relations with the European powers.¹²

The German conquest of Czechoslovakia and the Italian occupation of Albania in 1939 were clear signals to Turkey that both Berlin and Rome were following expansionist policies. The early victims of this expansionist policy were small and defenseless new actors in the international political arena.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-10.

¹² Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 119-132. For a Turkish official view on Turkish-French relations before WWII, see T. C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları, 1935-1939*, Ankara, 1973, pp. 171-182.

German policies and actions in Central Europe were designed to dissolve the political structure of the region. This inevitably meant destruction of international peace and posed a serious threat to Balkan security. Thus, the German and Turkish political orientations and goals became diametrically opposed to each other.

Regional arrangements such as the Entente and the Balkan Pact failed to provide the security they were intended to furnish, because the member nations of these pacts had abjectly failed to coordinate their policies in respect to the great powers. As a result, some members of these pacts were the first to fall prey to German aggression at the outbreak of World War II. The two revisionist powers of Europe—Germany and Italy—were following courses of action in the Balkan and the Mediterranean, respectively, that were essentially against the national interests of Turkey.

To be able to resist German economic pressure on Turkey, Ankara had to find suitable alternatives in England and France. After the Italian aggression in Ethiopia, Turkey was obliged to search for new foreign sources for imports. Turkey was under obligation not to import goods from Italy after the League of Nations had imposed economic sanction against Rome, for its aggression in Ethiopia. Turkey had voted in favor of the sanctions. It was evident that Turkey attached more importance to maintaining good relations with the League of Nations than to conserve commercial ties with Italy. Thus, Ankara's relations with Rome declined.¹³

Ataturk accurately understood the advantages Turkey could enjoy due to its strategic geographic location. Thus, he chartered a course of foreign policy action that would preserve Turkish national interest. He followed a policy of good neighborly relations with the Soviet Union and amicable relations with the Western powers and with her own neighbors. To achieve these goals, Turkey supported a collective security system that would ensure security and territorial integrity of all states. Also, Ankara consistently used peaceful means for settlement of disputes. As discussed above, Turkey's economic, geographic, and military conditions required this course of action in foreign policy. Collective and regional security ar-

¹³ Harry N. Howard, *Turkey, The Straits and the U. S. Policy* (Baltimore; The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 116-175.

rangements were deemed to be the safest way for small states to maintain their independence and territorial integrity.

F. The Political Dynamics During World War II

Although Turkey had signed a peace treaty with the Soviet Union in the 1920s, Ankara continued to keep a watchful eye on the growing military and ideological power of its northern neighbor and traditional adversary. By the mid 1930s, Atatürk had arrived at the conclusion that the Soviets had "reached a point where they contributed the greatest threat not (only) to Europe but to the whole of Asia." Atatürk had been reported to have made this statement in a 1934 conversation with General Douglas MacArthur. In the same conversation with MacArthur, Atatürk anticipated a major European war at the end of the decade. During this impending conflict, Atatürk assessed Germany to be strong enough to occupy almost the entire subcontinent of Europe, with the exception of the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. However, Atatürk expected the Soviet Union to be the ultimate winner in this conflict.¹⁴

What Atatürk expressed in 1934 was essentially the crux of political thinking of Turkish decision-makers. In the early days of World War II, Turkey declared its neutrality in the conflict, in the ardent hope that this action would assure continuous national security. Turkey had no interest to get involved in a European conflict, especially when its own national interests were not directly threatened. Further, Turkey had little military capability to face a major military threat from Europe. During the inter-war period, Turkey had neither the resources nor the time to rebuild its national forces and to bring them up to a European standard. On Turkey's military condition, Winston Churchill expressed his views, thus: "The Turks had none of the modern weapons which from May 1940 had proved to be decisive.... Their air force was lamentably weak and primitive ... and, they lacked adequate tanks and armored cars ... they had hardly any anti-aircraft artillery."¹⁵

As the flames of the war spread and gained momentum, Turkey's position became more vulnerable. On the one hand, the United Kingdom was advising Turkey that she would not be asked for an active participa-

¹⁴ Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Ataov, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 87.

tion in the war, provided she sided with the Allies. On the other hand, the Soviet Union informed Turkey that if Germany attacked her, the Russian would attack the Germans. This meant that Turkey's involvement would cause it to be occupied by the Nazis that, in turn, would bring the Soviets as "liberator" of Turkey. The Turks neither wanted the Germans nor the Soviets on their territory. They were determined to keep both at a safe distance; they trusted neither.

Simultaneously, the German and the Axis powers were urging Turkey to side with them. They wanted Turkey's participation in the war, to obtain easier access to the Arab Middle East, to Iran, and to the soft underbelly of the Soviet Union. They offered complete safety and territorial integrity to the Turks. The Turks, however, were not convinced. They took all the precautionary steps to safeguard their neutrality and their national independence. As a precautionary measure against a possible German thrust from the Balkans, the Turks blew up a strategic bridge over the river Maritsa.¹⁶

1. Turkish-Russian Relations

Although the Soviet Union offered a non-aggression pact and a promise to assist Turkey in case of an attack on her, Ankara refused to change her neutral stance. This proved to be a correct assessment of the situation. Later, the Germans revealed the secret Soviet expansionist intentions and interests in Finland and Turkey.¹⁷

After several months of negotiations with Ankara, Germany signed, on June 18, 1941, a ten-year non-aggression treaty with Turkey. Turkey signed this treaty to thwart German political pressure and with the full knowledge of its Western allies, especially of the United Kingdom. Turkey informed its Western allies that the German-Turkish treaty did not give Germany the right to tranship its troops and materiel through Turkey and that Turkey would not allow this to happen. While the Turco-German treaty induced no fundamental change in the Turkish position during the remaining war years, it did "neutralize" Turkey and "isolate Russia" prior to the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union scheduled for June 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 68-73.

¹⁷ Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 167-176.

During the war years, Turkey was deeply concerned about the balance of power system that would emerge after the hostilities ended. Ankara believed that in the post-war era, the European balance of power system would be dominated by Germany and the Soviet Union. The Turkish decision-makers, however, were surprised and disappointed by the evaluations and assessments of the American and British decision-makers. The Turkish and the Anglo-American assessments did not coincide with each other.¹⁸

The losses and gains suffered and achieved by the Allies and the Axis powers were assessed by Ankara, primarily, in terms of what consequences they would have for the country, for her immediate neighbors, as well as, for the Soviet war-making capabilities.¹⁹

The Turkish decision-makers were convinced that the Soviet Union, given a reasonable pretext, would pursue its age-old ambition of expansion toward the war-waters of the Mediterranean and to control the Turkish Straits for defense and commercial purposes. Determined to prevent the Soviet Union from violating Turkish sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, Turkish decision-makers set out to impede Russian success and expansion. Simultaneously, the Turkish decision-makers did everything prudently possible to strengthen the countervailing powers, not only the United Kingdom, and the United States, but, also, Germany.

For the Turks, the Soviet Union was the main adversary. From their perspective, whatever form the resolution of the conflict eventually took, and whoever the winner might be, the Turks wished to help create a balance of power system that would contain the Soviet ambitions and power. While the Turks were aspiring to contain the growing Soviet power, the Allied leaders meeting at Postdam, Yalta, and at Cairo, were preparing grounds for Soviet and political expansions in Europe and elsewhere. The post-war events proved Turkish fears and apprehensions to be valid.

The Turks attached their national security to the creation of an international balance of power that would protect small states. This remained their foreign policy objective both during and after World War II. As the Turks could not engage in foreign adventures and could not independently protect themselves against a major military aggression, the only path

¹⁸ Lenczowski, *The Middle East*, pp. 138-147.

¹⁹ Lewis, *The Emergence*, pp. 119-123.

left open to them was in the direction of a systemic equilibrium. The checks and balances of such a system, they concluded, might assure for them what they could not accomplish independently.²⁰

2. Turkish-Allies Relations

The Turkish refusal to assume a more active diplomatic posture at the international level, was a reflection of Ankara's dissatisfaction with U. S. policies toward the Soviet Union and of a realistic and pragmatic assessment of their own capabilities and limitations. They had learned well their lesson about wartime secret diplomacy during WW I. It was difficult for them not to recall the secret negotiations and agreements among First World War allies for the partition of the Ottoman Empire and of Anatolia. Also, they could not help but recall the deceptive maneuvers by which the British and the French governments, first, instigated and helped some Arab tribes to revolt against the Ottoman Empire, and subsequently, enslaved their erstwhile allies, the Arabs. Following the occupation of Arab lands, the British and the French colonial rulers proceeded to redraw national boundaries and to impose their political and cultural preferences on the areas under their respective control. The occupying powers policies and actions in the Middle East created new entities and power-centres in the region, upsetting the subsystemic balance for decades to come. Under the impact of Western political concepts such as territorial nationalism, nation-state, and the principle of self-determination, well-established historical realities were disregarded in favor of immediate satisfaction of the current political and economic needs.

The Turkish decision-makers perceived their national security to be inextricably tied to the creation and development of a process of systemic equilibrium. The Allied demand of an unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan was considered to be an error of judgement by the Turks. They believed the Allied demand and its consummation would be an open invitation to the Soviet Union to extend its hegemony and influence over large areas in Europe and Asia. The post-war events in Europe and Asia showed that the Turkish projections about Soviet designs were accurate.²¹

²⁰ Lenczowski, *The Middle East*, p. 145-147.

²¹ Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 43-54.

Turkey was determined not to fall either within the orbit of the Soviet influence after the war, nor to provide any pretext to Moscow to move its troops into the Anatolian peninsula or to allow the Kremlin any role in the administration and operation of the Turkish Straits. Because of the close war-time cooperation among the Allied powers, the Turkish decision-makers could not openly and fully convey their apprehensions and concerns to Washington and London. The Turks knew that the substance of all conversations between them and London and Washington were being promptly "leaked" to the representatives of the Soviet Union. This information was regularly used by the Soviet Union for propaganda purposes, for putting pressure on Turkey, and, possibly for driving a wedge between Ankara and London, and Ankara and Washington.²²

Consequently, the Turkish representatives assiduously avoided written communication about the Soviet Union with London and Washington. Although this method of communication was considered prudent by the Turks, it tarnished the international image of Turkey. Those who failed to understand the reasons behind Ankara's refusal to get actively involved in international diplomacy during WWII considered Turkey as being indecisive and non-committal.

Ismet Inonu, President of Turkey during WW II, understood clearly the policies pursued by the U. S. President, Roosevelt, and the British Prime Minister, Churchill. At all costs, the Allied powers wanted a German and Japanese defeat and their unconditional surrender. Inonu had no power to influence or to contradict the policy pursued by the Western allies. During the war, what mattered most for the allies was to maintain the alliance cohesion and comradeship among its members. Outside interference in their relationship would not have been tolerated by the Western allies, especially if such an interference had involved a note of caution about extension of Soviet power and influence in the post-war era.

By articulating their concern and apprehension about the Soviet Union in the post-war era, the Turks would have antagonized Moscow and would have endangered their national security. Thus, the Turks preferred to maintain an informal channel of communication for expressing their concerns to the Western allies.²³ Lessons of history, especially that of the

²² Howard, *Turkey, The Straits*, pp. 200-209.

²³ Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 319-324.

last hundred years of the Ottoman Empire, and of WW I, had provided enough understanding of and insight into the working of European diplomacy, to justify the Turkish determination to stay out of any international situation that would expose them to new and more serious national perils.

Turkish foreign policy between 1939 and 1945 was formulated and implemented to insure benefits of the systemic security without becoming openly aligned or opposed to the goals and aims of any one of the great powers. The determinants of this policy were selfpreservation, national security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The subsystemic and systemic forces were utilized to achieve these goals. During the war, the only way for Turkey to attain its national goals was to pursue a policy of strict neutrality.²⁴

At a certain stage of the war, the Turkish leaders showed a willingness to abandon Turkey's neutral stance and to add its strength to the Allies forces. This show of willingness was based on the premise that the Allies would provide sufficient amount of arms and ammunition and training for the Turkish armed forces. Another premise of this willingness was that the British and the Americans would make a commitment to contain the Soviet Union after the defeat of Germany. In short, in addition to obtaining modern arms and training from the Allies, Ankara wanted a guarantee for the nation's survival in the systemic conditions that would prevail after an unconditional surrender of Germany.

The British did not offer any assurances to Turkey for its post-war concerns. They were war-weary and their economy and military capabilities were not sufficient to maintain peace and order even in their own traditional sphere of influence, as was seen later in 1945-47, when they had to inform the United States that the United Kingdom could do nothing to contain the USSR from expanding towards the Mediterranean.²⁵

During the war years, Turkey was being urged to actively participate in the conflict and to make sacrifices without being conferred with full rights to share the lend-lease assistance offered by the United States to the war-time allies. In short, the parties in the conflict were forming the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

²⁵ Howard, *Turkey, The Straits*, pp. 261-266.

smallest possible circles of coalitions and alliances, sufficient to win the war or to alter the power ratio in the struggle, so as to distribute the spoils of war to the fewest possible members.

Throughout the war years, negotiations between Turkey and the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers continued. Some of these negotiations were genuine, others were pseudo-negotiations. To understand fully the Turkish foreign policy during this period, it would be useful to have a quick look at the subsystemic forces interacting with Turkey.

3. Turkish-Subsystemic Relations

During 1923-1939, Turkey was involved in several regional organizations, with overlapping memberships, which attempted to create a *cordon sanitaire* around the southwestern and southern borders of the Soviet Union. Turkey was a member of the Balkan Pact which was linked with the Little Entente through Yugoslavia and Rumania. Turkey, also, was a member of the Saadabad Pact between Afganistan, Iran, Iraq. Thus, Turkey was the linkstate between the Saadabad and the Balkan Pacts.²⁶ Similar attempts would be made in the 1940s and 1950s that produced different reactions and developments, both at the domestic and international levels.

The defensive pacts and agreements entered into by small states of the Middle East and the Balkans proved to be ineffective. These pacts and agreements disintegrated under war pressures and conditions. The main reason for the failure of these pacts was that the member states were neither ready nor willing to coordinate their defense policies and plans. The worst case of this lack of cooperation was in the Balkans.

Conclusions:

The two postulates of the Turkish Foreign policy during WW II were neutrality and creative engagement in European diplomacy. The underlying principles for these postulates were based on the lessons learned from history, especially from the events of previous decades. The Turks entered the third decade of the Twentieth Century with feelings of deep cynicism and strong distrust of foreign powers. Simultaneously, they manifested

²⁶ Lenczowski, *The Middle East*, pp. 131-133.

a great deal of self-reliance, determination and perseverance to survive and to develop economically. Under these circumstances (1) peace, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national development became the driving force; whereas, (2) the Soviet military threat and its and Moscow's demands on Turkish territory and on the Turkish Straits became the major factors shaping Turkish foreign policies during the period under review.

In the post-WW I era, Turkey was the first state to use legal means to have changes made in a post-war I multi-national treaty. She was the first state to win such a "moral victory" at the negotiation table against the victors of WW I. Through collective and regional security arrangements, Turkey attempted to protect its national security and territorial integrity. The efforts to create a "cordon sanitaire" through the Balkan Pact, the Little Entente and the Saadabad Pact were the best examples of a small state diplomacy. This diplomacy was based on a realistic and pragmatic assessment of the state's capabilities. Although none of the pacts proved to be effective, they were, under the circumstances, the best methods to play the passive defence game. These pacts also set the tone for the coming decades and they prepared the ground for the moves against the expected and growing Soviet danger in the region.

Turkey, using and balancing the systemic and subsystemic factors, managed to stay out of WW II. Ankara prepared itself to cope with the dramatically changing circumstances of the post-World War II period. By the end of WW II, Turkey was ready to become a more active participant in international politics.

Globally, economic development gained primary importance. The WW II economic conditions under which the country had to survive, brought to forefront the urgency of the country's economic development needs. In the post-WW II era, this factor ascended in priority and became a prime determinant in the making of Turkish foreign policy.

Changing international conditions and priorities after WW II ushered in a series of domestic reforms in the country. The reforms introduced by Ataturk had, by this time, taken roots and the time was right for the next stages of political development to occur, such as the inauguration a more democratic system. These changes helped link Turkey ever so closely to the Western powers. With the benefit of a 20/20 hindsight, one must conclude that Turkey's foreign policies during the period under discussion were both "Solvent" and successful.

