İSTANBUL
ÜNİVERSİTESİ
YAYINEVİ

SİYASAL: Journal of Political Sciences

RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

An Ontological Security Analysis of Americanism in Turkish Foreign Policy, 1945-1960

Türk Dış Politikasında Amerikancılığın Ontolojik Güvenlik Analizi, 1945-1960

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Abstract

This article aims to draw attention to an aspect of Turkish foreign policy that has not been sufficiently theorized, especially within the framework of Ontological Security Theory. It attempts to show that one of the motives of Turkish foreign policy for its increasing orientation towards the West in the early Cold War period was to complete the three-century-long project of Westernization and to find a relevant place in the international system. As an alternative version to the European model of Westernism or modernization, Americanism in Turkish foreign policy appeared as an illustration of the ontological security concerns of the country alongside its political, economic, and security interests. Under the Western security umbrella, the Turkish state sought not only to protect its territory from the Soviet threat but also to secure its state identity as an important part of Western civilization. Accordingly, Türkiye adopted an anti-Soviet stance and tried to secure its place in the Western bloc, but often acted in favor of the United States and against its own national interests. This attitude has implications for the Ontological Security approach, which interprets the irrational and identity-oriented behavior of the nation-states as an effort to maintain the security of their 'being.' Consequently, this study argues that the pursuit of ontological security was an important element of Turkish foreign policy during this period.

Keywords: Turkish Foreign Policy, Ontological Security Theory, Americanism, Western Bloc

Öz

Bu makale, Türk dış politikasının, özellikle Ontolojik Güvenlik kavramı çerçevesinde, yeterince kuramsallaştırılmamış bir yönüne dikkat çekmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türk dış politikasının Soğuk Savaş döneminin başlarında Batı'ya doğru artan yöneliminin nedenlerinden birinin üç yüzyıldır devam eden Batılılaşma veya modernleşme projesini tamamlamak ve uluslararası sistemde kendine uygun bir yer bulmak olduğunu göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Türk dış politikasında Amerikancılık, Batıcılığın Avrupa modeline alternatif bir versiyon olarak ülkenin siyasi, ekonomik ve güvenlik çıkarlarının yanı sıra ontolojik güvenlik kaygılarının da bir göstergesi olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Zira Batı güvenlik şemsiyesi altında Türk devleti sadece topraklarını Sovyet tehdidinden korumayı değil, aynı zamanda Batı medeniyetinin önemli bir parçası olarak devlet kimliğini de güvence altına almayı amaçlamıştır. Bu doğrultuda Türkiye, Sovyet karşıtı bir tutum benimseyerek Batı bloğundaki yerini sağlamlaştırmaya çalışmış, ancak çoğu zaman ABD'nin lehine ve kendi ulusal çıkarlarının aleyhine hareket etmiştir. Bu tutum, devletlerin irrasyonel ve kimlik odaklı davranışlarını onların 'varoluş' güvenliğini sürdürme çabası olarak yorumlayan Ontolojik Güvenlik yaklaşımı için çıkarımlar sunuyor. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma ontolojik güvenlik arayışının bu dönemde Türk dış politikasının önemli bir unsuru olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Dış Politikası, Ontolojik Güvenlik Kuramı, Amerikancılık, Batı Bloku

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Introduction

The position of nation-states in the international system is one of the most important factors determining their domestic and foreign policies. In an international order based on competition, nation-states — especially those whose interests exceed their capabilities in terms of hard and soft powers — seek to develop different foreign policy visions and instruments to ensure their survival and maximize their national interests. The Turkish Republic and its foreign policy are, of course, no exception. In addition to the basic policies of nation-states, such as sovereignty, recognition, and territorial integrity, the status quo and Westernization (or modernization) have been accepted and treated as fundamental principles of Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP), despite constant changes and transformations in decision-making (Oran, 1996). While the former has been adopted primarily to protect national security and stability in its region, the latter is about building and maintaining a modern national identity for the Turkish society and state. TFP has also adopted 'pragmatism' as an overarching guiding principle for understanding events and shaping behavior. Each of these principles has had a significant impact on the Turkish perspective on regional and international developments, and thus on the self-image and narrative of the Turkish state to date.

Existing studies on TFP primarily address issues of security, diplomacy, alliances, and more recently, identity. Specifically, the concept of identity and the influence of ideological factors on the Turkish foreign policymaking process have been approached from different perspectives — largely through realist (Yalvaç, 2014; Oğuzlu & Han, 2023) and constructivist frameworks (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003; Demirtaş-Coşkun, 2011) — yet have not been extensively studied through the lens of Ontological Security Theory (OST). Within the limited yet noteworthy literature on this topic, Adısönmez and Onursal (2020) investigate the subject in the recent post-July 15 coup attempt period in Türkiye, focusing on the (in)security discourse of the government. Tutan (2020) directs attention to the relationship between political psychology and ontological security, as reflected in Türkiye's bilateral relations with Syria, Greece, and Azerbaijan over the last few decades. Similarly, Küçük (2021) analyzes bilateral conflicts between Greece and Türkiye based on their ontological security concerns. Another example of a focus on bilateral relations is provided by Pusane and Ilgıt (2022), for whom Türkiye's search for ontological security has impeded the development of positive bilateral relations with the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). In a more recent exploration, Gülseveren (2023) attempts to discern how the deterioration of bilateral relations between Türkiye and Israel in the 2010s was instrumentalized to satisfy their ontological security needs through identity-based narratives.

In seeking to contribute to the aforementioned literature, this paper aims to analyze how Turkish policymakers, in the early stages of the Cold War, formulated TFP under the influence of the United States of America (USA or simply the US) and delineated the national identity of the Turkish state within the international system. This analysis employs the lens of ontological security theory, which is primarily concerned with understanding and representing a political agency's constant sense of being in its relations with others within a given social structure (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006a; Steele, 2008; Browning & Joenniemi, 2017). The core argument of this study is that Americanism in

TFP evolved not solely based on Türkiye's security and political interests in the context of the Cold War but also due to ontological security concerns. The country sought to establish a concrete modern state identity through stable and routinized relations with the Western world. Within the three fundamental levels of analysis — international system (structure and characteristics), nation-state (identities and interests), and individual (personal characteristics, perceptions, ideologies, and policy preferences of decision-makers) — referred to in the discipline of International Relations (IR), the focus of this research is the nation-state, the Turkish state (Mingst, McKibben, & Toft, 2019, pp. 107-109).

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design developed based on the collection of primary and secondary sources. Data is gathered from academic sources focusing on Turkish foreign policymakers and their foreign policy orientation influenced by domestic and international developments. However, it should be noted that the research may encounter potential obstacles, limitations, and practical problems due to the abundance of data and constraints on the research's ability to fully address them. Moreover, this work can be considered introductory since it aims to provide insight into understanding and reinforcing the assumptions of the ontological security approach applied to the analysis of a long period in TFP. In terms of structure, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section presents the theoretical framework of the paper, namely, the Ontological Security approach. The following two sections briefly explain the basic principles and evolution of TFP over the past century and the conceptual framework of the paper, i.e., Americanism, in a concise manner. The next section focuses on the selected period of TFP during the early decades of the Cold War era. Finally, the concluding section highlights the main findings of the study.

Theoretical Framework: Ontological Security

The traditional understanding of security in IR theory prioritizes the physical security of the state above all its other needs. According to Mearsheimer (2013), the neorealist conception of national security/survival is considered the primary and ultimate goal of every nation-state in the conflict-ridden and self-help international system, where each nation-state must ensure its security. In this state-centric view, the basis of the state action on the international stage is the pursuit of feeling secure from any physical threat to its existence. In recent decades, however, this narrow meaning of security and the agenda of contemporary security studies have faced scrutiny and broadened in analysis. The Copenhagen School, a pioneer in the new and critical analysis of security, has expanded the concept's scope to include non-military aspects. In this multidimensional view, threats and security concerns occur in interrelated sectors, encompassing not only the military and political but also the social, environmental, and economic realms (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). Since the 1990s, the debate has increasingly included the role of non-state actors and non-material factors such as identity, which has been ignored by mainstream IR theory for years. Developed in such an evolving intellectual environment, OST, with its perspective and contributions to the concept of security, has carved out a new space and gradually gained a broader place in IR theory and literature since the early 2000s. Drawing on the disciplines of Sociology and Psychology, its assumptions specifically align with those of the Social Constructivist approach in IR theory.

The concept of ontological security, coined by psychiatrist R.D. Laing in 1965, implies a psychological situation in which individuals, in this case, nation-states, seek continuity and stability in their existence. Laing posits that individuals respond to threats to their existential position with anxious defensiveness, viewing ontological security as a relational and instinctive tendency of the self "to preserve its autonomy and identity" (1990, p. 52). Sociologist Giddens, a central figure in studies on the topic, also defines ontological security as "a sense of continuity and order in events" (1991, p. 244). However, these scholars do not necessarily perceive identity as something constant for ontological security; instead of being given and fixed, identities are alive, socially constructed, shaped by context, and evolving. According to Giddens, "self-identity is not something that is just given…but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual" (1991, p. 52). The key point is that "ontological security refers to the feeling of stability: when we feel our identity is stable, we are ontologically secure" (Mitzen & Larson, 2017, p. 3). Browning and Joenniemi (2017) further contribute to the topic by stating that identity is not only about "preservation" but also about "adaptation," making OST valuable for understanding identity-related issues that nation-states face in domestic and world politics.

A key feature of OST ("security as being") is that the individual or the state establishes and articulates its self-identity through a set of instruments and practices. When challenges to routinized relationships and one's own identity create anxiety and make the agent feel insecure, biographical narratives (telling stories or events) help the political agency construct and consolidate its self-image. As nation-states confront external threats to their "physical, social, and ontological security," they turn to autobiographical stories to overcome these challenges (Subotic, 2016, p. 611). Widening the scope of the debate, Mitzen argues that states need not only physical security but also ontological security ("a sense of continuity"), making a subtle distinction between the two: "ontological security is security not of the body but of the self" (2006a, p. 344). To support this perspective, she analyzes the literature on the role of ontological security-seeking in the foreign policy decision-making process, emphasizing the potential for conflicting policy preferences between the ontological and material security concerns of the state (Mitzen & Larson, 2017). Moreover, Mitzen posits that uncertainty in the system arising from the security-seeking behaviors of states, the possibility of conflict, and the threat of physical harm can also provide ontological security for the state. This is because the state authority, feeling insecure in the face of a threat, tends to dedicate its energy to developing deliberate policies and building stable and routinized social relations with others to reduce anxiety and maintain its selfhood (Mitzen, 2006a). Similar to Mitzen, Subotic (2016) discusses the issue, highlighting the central role of narratives in foreign policy behavior through the case of Kosovo's secession from Serbia in 2008. In her view, the Serbian political leadership activated the historical narrative of "victimhood, injustice, and national revival" to justify the unwanted shift in its foreign policy from rejection to recognition of Kosovo, defined as a key element of Serbian identity, to ensure ontological security of the Serbian nation (2016, p. 621).

The irrational or morality-based behavior of states can also be interpreted through the lens of OST. Steele (2005) illustrates this with the example of the British pursuit of

ontological security ("a sense of continuity") during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Based on a cost-benefit analysis, British policymakers did not see much moral benefit in intervening in the war, which would challenge their slavery policy and established selfhood. As a result, despite the potential strategic and economic benefits of war, they opted for neutrality to preserve Britain's international image (Steele, 2005, p. 519). From the OST perspective, such irrationality is because, like human beings, the state has various physical and non-physical needs, such as a sense of self-pride, honor, prestige, and freedom from fear and anxiety. Shame, in this context, serves as both something that ontological security-seeking actors attempt to escape and a drive to restore the former situation (Steele, 2008). Nation-states also have identities, ideological worldviews, routines, and a set of beliefs, rules, and values, and thus strive for both physical and ontological security. Wendt (2004) explains that the nation-state can be considered to have real properties attributed to personality, so they should be treated as real "persons" in world politics in International Relations (IR) theory and studies. According to Wendt, the personhood of states, despite their non-physical existence, lies in the fact that they possess three particular psychological properties: "Intentionality" (collective intentions) as they pursue common goals among their peoples; "consciousness" (groupthink) as they implement the meanings shared by society; and the property of being a "(super) organism" that comes into being and dies (at least the identity and legal personality they must have to exist) (Wendt, 2004). In line with this, Wendt defines ontological security ("predictability in relationships to the world") as one of the four fundamental interests of the state arising from its corporate identity, alongside international recognition, physical security, and socio-economic development (1994, p. 385). Given this, the focus of OST consists of psychological and ideational elements other than material ones, which is relevant to the case of TFP analyzed below.

Basic Principles and the Course of Turkish Foreign Policy

The two basic and overarching principles of TFP are Westernization and the status quo. They are often the subject of debates that argue the opposite, as the country has, from time to time, pursued revisionist tendencies and disengagement from the West, balancing East and West, or realigning the axis of TFP. However, the two maxims of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, have generally been upheld by decision-makers. His first maxim, "peace at home, peace in the world," expresses the policy of maintaining the existing order without resorting to aggression through irredentist or revisionist claims. The maxim of "reaching the contemporary level of civilization" aims at incorporating the political, economic, and social structure of Western civilization into the reconstruction process of modern Turkish society (Oran, 1996). For Atatürk, modernization meant a complete process of Westernization, involving the adoption of Western values and practices in a top-down nation-building project. Accordingly, the political identity of the Turkish state would be reshaped by the elements of modernity, such as progress, standardization of education, adoption of European law and the Latin alphabet, change of dress, separation of religion and the state, and republicanism institutionalized in the Constitution of 1937 — while rejecting traditions based on Islamic identity embraced by the previous Ottoman rule (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003, pp. 46-50).

Following Atatürk's balanced foreign policy, Türkiye tried to remain outside the warring camps during World War II (1939-1945), influenced by the aftermath of World

War I, socio-economic problems, poor military conditions, and the potential burdens of another war. The policy of "active neutrality and balance" between the belligerent powers was the guiding principle of TFP determined by İsmet İnönü (1938-1950) (Deringil, 2014). Similar to the late period of İnönü, the priority of TFP under Adnan Menderes (1950-1960), who initiated the democratization of the Turkish political system and furthered the institutionalization of relations with the West, was Westernism, or more precisely, Americanism. Without deviating from the Western orientation, TFP and political leadership in the 1960s and 1970s were largely dominated by the military bureaucracy. In contrast, the tenure of Turgut Özal (1987-1993) is discussed within the framework of political and economic liberalization and the idea of neo-Ottomanism, aiming to improve bilateral relations with neighboring countries in a wide range of areas from the Middle East, the Balkans, and Central Asia to the Caucasus. During this period, the inclination toward the West was reflected in the country's efforts to become part of the European Economic Community (EEC), today's European Union (EU) (Balcı, 2013). In the post-Cold War period, Türkiye pursued a revised and proactive foreign policy with a multilateral approach in its region and beyond, but not entirely independent of Western-oriented foreign policy or domestic influences (Oran, 1996). Since the beginning of the 21st century, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2002-present), TFP has expanded its scope, strategy, and tools through a multifaceted vision that encompasses both physical and ontological security needs.

Conceptual Framework: Americanism in Turkish Foreign Policy

Americanism has been a fact of life in international relations since the 19th century, associated with the global influence of the United States, making it a hegemon in the international system with capabilities in various fields. The concept can be explained as a sense of admiration for and a tendency to use American style and practices as a model for the social and cultural life, and economic and political development of a country outside the US. Over time, however, the term has acquired negative connotations due to growing US influence and uneven development in developing countries (Elteren, 2006). In the context of Turkish Americanism, the term can be understood within the framework of the Westernization project, a complex and non-linear process of modernization in various sectors of Ottoman society dating back to the late 18th century. Beginning with the military, following the Western development path to strengthen central authority and internal stability and regain waning power internationally, the state-led reform efforts gradually spread to legal, administrative, political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Another reason was the goal of the Ottoman leadership to ally with the European powers against Russia after repeated wars and territorial losses. Although the Ottoman leadership did not succeed in restoring its former status and preventing the disintegration of the empire, the modernization movement remained a source of debate and one of the main policies of the new regime after the First World War in the country (Arı, 2021, pp. 16-17).

Türkiye's War of Independence (1919-1922), largely directed against European powers, led to the emergence of the American modernization model as an alternative to the European one, and the American mandate debate in the country. Despite a positive image, the understanding of Westernization with Europe persisted until the mid-1940s due

to domestic and foreign policy situations, particularly the isolationist foreign policy of the US. Immediately after World War II, when European powers ceded their former role to the US, which became the superpower of the new world order, the Western orientation of TFP was redefined (Bora, 2002). After World War II, Türkiye's Western orientation shifted toward Americanism, driven by the fear of communist expansion and the Soviet Union's interests in the Turkish Straits by demanding joint control of the geostrategically important Straits in a 1946 note. Rumors of Soviet territorial claims to Kars and Ardahan (an unproven idea) led Türkiye to view the US as a counterweight to the Soviets and to pursue a policy aimed at improving Turkish-American relations and strengthening its position in the anti-Soviet camp (Gökay, 2006, pp. 59-62). The country's anti-communist ideology and Western-oriented foreign policy reached its peak with a clear expression of Americanism during the time of İnönü and Menderes. The trigger for the increasing influence of the US in the political, economic, military, and even cultural spheres of Turkish society was the economic and political liberalization process that began under Menderes. The Cold War not only enabled the Turkish state to receive American support in various areas, from military training to foreign aid but also to use the case of the US as a model for the modernization of the country (Örnek, 2015). This ideal was embodied in the proclaimed words attributed to President Celal Bayar: "We/Türkiye will become a little America in 30 years" (Vatan, 27.10.1957).

The construction and articulation of modern state identity in TFP were directly influenced by the reinterpretation of traditional Western orientation and the new context, under which the country needed American assistance (Bora, 2017). During this period, Turkish politicians considered the US as the true representative of the "free and civilized" world and a great opportunity to complete the country's ongoing modernization process and protect its interests. This approach is reflected in the words of the Turkish writer Rifki Atay, who stated, "For us, American Westernism, not European Westernism, should be the essential one" (Bora, 2017, p. 78). Accordingly, the sympathy toward the American model and the idea of "Turkish-American friendship" were publicly idealized through political and intellectual discourses and modes of mass communication (Bora, 2002). In other words, until the late 1950s, Turkish Americanism developed based on both ideological affinity and the pragmatic goals of Turkish leaders. While the period from 1945 to 1960 witnessed a generally positive course in Turkish-US bilateral relations, criticisms centered on the main argument of an asymmetrical relationship and the subordination of Türkiye's national interests to American global strategy and policies, which became more prominent in the 1960s (Bilgiç, 2015). Since then, discussions of the dynamics of Turkish-American relations and Americanism have been an important aspect of TFP studies.

Findings and Discussion: Turkish Foreign Policy, 1945-1960

Türkiye, which managed to stay out of World War II by not taking sides, could not maintain its stance in the ideological war between the communist Eastern bloc and the capitalist Western bloc after the war. In the context of the Cold War, the Turkish leadership pursued a foreign policy that aligned its interests with the Western camp against the Eastern camp because "interests are a product of identity constructions" (Browning & Joenniemi,

2017, p. 6). The periods of İnönü and Menderes witnessed the rapid development of Turkish-American relations and the integration of the country into Western institutions. In contrast to the relatively balanced and neutral foreign policy of the early years of his rule, İnönü's last years were marked by a clear turn towards Britain and the US. For him, establishing good relations with them would benefit Türkiye's development in the civilized world (İlyas & Turan, 2012, p.337). This was because İnönü openly pursued a policy of continuing the principles of the founding leader, Atatürk, in both its domestic and foreign policy (Aydemir, 2011). Likewise, TFP under Menderes was mostly Western-oriented, according to Tuncer (2013, p. 22), since "Atatürk's principle of modernization was perceived by the Menderes government as the implementation of a policy in line with Western foreign policy." In this respect, Türkiye's membership in the pacts and organizations in the Middle East served the regional policies of the West, especially the US and Britain, and not only its own interests (Tuncer, 2013).

Giddens states that "the maintenance of habits and routines is a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties" (1991, p. 39). In its search for a Western status, feeling secure against the Soviet threat, and consolidation of the modern state identity in the Cold War environment, Türkiye sought to play an active role in Western-led international organizations. This policy was evident in Türkiye's voting behavior on resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council and in the draft resolutions it submitted, which were in line with its Western allies rather than being independent and serving its national interests. Based on the discourse of "reaching the contemporary level of civilization," Ankara's main motivation was to be recognized by the Western world as "an equal and respected member of the Western camp" (Kumek, 2022, p. 561). Türkiye's inclusion in the Western collective security system due to its geopolitical and strategic position was important for the US strategy in the region. Receiving military and economic aid under the Truman Doctrine (1947), designed as a project to protect countries under ideological and military pressure from the Soviets, Türkiye institutionalized its relations with the Western camp. Within this framework, the Joint American Military Mission for Aid to Türkiye (JAMMAT) was established to facilitate modernization, improve military capabilities, and integrate the Turkish army into the collective security mechanism through military support and training. However, it has been criticized on the grounds of harming the organization and development of the Turkish army and defense industry (Celep, 2018). In the same year, Türkiye was also included in the Marshall Plan, which aimed to rebuild war-ravaged Europe with economic aid. Despite mixed results, its integration process helped the Turkish state to feel physically and ontologically secure. For Turkish Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak, for instance, the Truman Doctrine "... made the Turkish people feel that they were no longer isolated" (Hale, 2013, p. 83).

With the desire to be part of the "civilized" world, the Turkish government sought to join the Western bloc through the application of international institutions because "individuals are motivated to create cognitive and behavioral certainty, which they do by establishing routines" (Mitzen, 2006a, p. 342). In addition to its membership in the Council of Europe, the IMF, and the World Bank, the event that turned Türkiye into an ally of the Western community was its admission to NATO in 1952, the political and security umbrella for the peace and security of the Western world (Hale, 2013, pp. 84-87). As OST indicates, the search for a stable identity that depends on routine relations with

others through recognition and constant interaction encourages the agency to construct a self-identity and organize its actions (Mitzen, 2006b). Türkiye's dependence on the West for its security and political goals stemmed from both anxieties about its national security and the intention to be a strategic partner in multilateral cooperation, through which Türkiye would stabilize its relations with the West and consolidate its 'Western' identity. As Mitzen argues, "because routines sustain identity, actors become attached to them...and routinized social relations stabilize our identities" (2006a, p. 347).

During this period, the country also entered the democratization process under the Democrat Party government of Menderes through the first multi-party elections of the country in 1946 to complete the westernization or modernization process. The first truly free elections of 1950 ended the long authoritarian and single-party regimes of Atatürk and İnönü and initiated an American-style liberalization process in both political and economic life, which also paved the way for the Americanization of TFP. It is often argued that one reason for the liberal reorientation of Turkish politics was the external pressure exerted on the İnönü government by the US, which emerged victorious from the war and would determine the new world order with liberal principles. In this sense, for the Turkish authorities, "resistance to the democratic transition could result in exclusion from the Western world" (Yetkin, 2014, pp. 150-157). In essence, the establishment of stable relations and cooperation with the Western alliance would secure the international recognition of the Turkish state (Kosebalaban, 2011, pp. 69-74). The fear of being behind or outside the West (i.e., a sense of ontological insecurity), as well as the uncertainty stemming from the ideological clash with the Soviets, often led Türkiye to make concessions to the US-led alliance. Thus, engaging with the West could prove to be both beneficial and detrimental to the country.

The cost-benefit analysis of foreign policy decisions and actions on ontological security may contradict the realist assumption that states make decisions to maximize their outcomes (Steele, 2005). For some, like Bozdağlıoğlu (2003), Türkiye's alliance with the West in the early years of the Cold War negatively affected its image in the Middle East region, which at that time was fighting for its independence against Western imperialism and colonialism. Türkiye, the first Muslim country to recognize Israel in 1949, was labeled as a tool of the West by the Middle Eastern countries. The anti-imperialist ideology led the Arab world to form pro-Soviet and anti-Western alliances in which Türkiye was considered an extension of the imperialist camp due to its membership in the capitalist bloc and its pro-Western stance. Türkiye's participation in regional diplomatic initiatives against the Socialist bloc — perceived by these countries as a staunch supporter of Arab nationalism and independence — in line with Western interests, renewed the criticism and distrust of Türkiye. For example, the Baghdad Pact, through which Türkiye sought to win over countries of the region, was established in 1955 as a defense and cooperation organization but failed to win the confidence of the regional countries and instead accelerated their rapprochement with the Soviet Union (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003, pp. 115-120).

Türkiye's Participation in the Korean War

Although Turkish Foreign Minister Numan Menemencioğlu claimed during World War II that "We (Türkiye/Turkish people) are selfish; we fight only for ourselves"

(Deringil, 2014, p. 5), Türkiye sent its troops to a country even though it had no interests or reasons to fight there. The reason for Türkiye's sacrifice was the effort to reaffirm its commitment to the Western security system by sending a 4,500-strong force to the Korean War without consulting parliament, resulting in more than 721 dead and 2,147 veterans in the Turkish force (Turan, 1991, pp. 160-164). "As states must create meanings for their actions, no matter what the potential outcome of such actions will be," the 'rationalization' of actions in various ways is likely (Steele, 2008, p. 109). In the same way, Prime Minister Menderes described joining NATO as a national victory, saying "We lost a handful of blood in Korea, but we joined the great states" (Turan, 1991, p. 165). According to Kumek, the decision to send troops to the Korean War was motivated by Türkiye's concerns about its "status insecurity" and its fear of being excluded from the Western alliance. This perception stemmed from the rejection of Ankara's applications for non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council in 1946, which was seen as a means of status consolidation, and for membership in NATO, defined as the guarantor of the peace and security of the Western Alliance, in 1950 (2022, p. 573).

The Crises of Jupiter Missiles and the U-2 Incident

Türkiye's position in the Western alliance and policy orientation later led to the rise of anti-Americanism among the Turkish public. This pressure on the government increased when Türkiye made unilateral concessions, such as the use of the Incirlik base in Adana for purposes not listed on the NATO map, the removal of Jupiter missiles (considered a means of national security against the Eastern bloc), and misconduct by American soldiers at home (Guney, 2008). Several bilateral agreements between Türkiye and the US resulted in the delivery of large amounts of foreign aid and debt. Among them, the Aid Agreement under the Truman Doctrine (1947) was compared by some Turkish nationalist figures and intellectuals to "capitulations"[1] on the grounds that the US was granted excessive rights over Türkiye's military and economic domains, violating its "sovereignty" and increasing its dependence on the economic and military aid provided by the US. Similarly, the Economic Cooperation Agreement (1948) under the Marshall Plan faced strong criticism for being conditional and prioritizing the interests of the US over those of Türkiye and its development needs (Bilgiç, 2015, pp. 256-259).

Although survival or national security is considered the primary concern of nation-states, their pursuit of ontological security can also lead them to engage in risky and not necessarily rational behaviors that threaten their physical security and national interests (Steele, 2008). Similarly, for Mitzen, under certain conditions "ontological security can conflict with physical security" (2006a, p. 342). Türkiye's commitment to the Western security structure caused it to make what some consider irrational decisions, such as accepting the installation of the US missiles and military bases under the North Atlantic Treaty (1949). Concrete examples of this situation can be achieved by shedding light on the plane crash and the Jupiter missile crisis faced by Türkiye, a neighbor of the Soviet

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1 Special amenities and concessions granted to foreign countries and their nationals in various areas for political, social, and economic reasons by different means during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. As they were seen as a means of exploitation that weakened or deteriorated the Turkish economy, independence, and political authority, the capitulations were abolished with the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 2023 (Pamir, 2002, p. 90).

Union at the time because it was an ally of the US. At the time of the Cuban crisis, the US government decided to install the Jupiter missiles (intermediate-range ballistic missiles) in Izmir, Türkiye, to deter Soviet aggression but withdrew them in exchange for the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba without the consent of Turkish authorities (Seydi, 2010).

Besides increasing its importance in the Western security structure, the geopolitical location of Türkiye made the country vulnerable to physical threats in the race between the two poles. Another incident contributing to this situation was the U-2 incident, which also violated the sovereignty of the Turkish state and endangered its national security. At the time, the multifaceted rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union escalated into an arms race, particularly in the areas of nuclear missiles and space. The installation of military bases on the territory of allies raised serious security concerns for the host countries on both sides. Despite serious Soviet warnings, Türkiye was one of the few allies in the Western bloc to agree to the installation of nuclear missiles on its lands. The U-2 spy plane of the US, launched from the Incirlik base in Türkiye, entered Soviet airspace over Pakistan's territory and was shot down over Soviet territory in May 1960, escalating the Cold War tensions between the two blocs. Following the incident, the Soviet Union targeted the Western Bloc, threatening the US and its allies by stating, "…next time, we will destroy such planes and the bases from which they take off…" (Gülmez & Tahancı, 2014, p. 235).

The Rise of the Cyprus Question

While Türkiye was consolidating its position in the Western bloc, it began to address the issue of the island of Cyprus, considering it a "baby homeland" (*yavru vatan*) that was being internationalized in those years. However, Türkiye approached the matter with caution and hesitation due to its preoccupation with its status in the international arena. In the late stages of British colonial administration, the Island's two ethnically and religiously divided communities began to clash over the sovereignty of the island. In addition to British tactics of divide and rule, the irredentist and proactive policies of the Greeks, and the lack of a significant counterattack from the Turkish side due to its reactive policies and hesitant attitude, fear of Soviet claims to the straits, and reliance on British promises for the security of the Island, the Greek position was increasingly strengthened vis-à-vis the Turkish Cypriots (Holland, 2020, pp. 760-762). Türkiye's avoidance of the problem in the early years of the conflict can be seen in the words of Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü, "At the moment, an issue like the Cyprus problem is not our concern" (Dağcı & Diyarbakırlıoğlu, 2013, p. 26). Köprülü also revealed that the government had no clear policy on Cyprus in the early 1950s, stating that "there is no Cyprus problem" at the time (Tuncer, 2013, p. 163). Türkiye's priority of strengthening relations with the West deeply determined its foreign policy actions regarding the long-standing problem.

A Search for Ontological Security in the Ideological Conflict?

After World War II, which ended with the victory of the liberal doctrine, the world entered into a prolonged ideological struggle between the capitalist liberal world and the communist world. The emergence of the bipolar international order gave sovereign

members of the world community clear options: choose a side between the two blocs, creating a distinction between 'us/allies' and 'them/rivals,' and determine their position among the members, or join neither bloc. This situation aligns with Wendt's (1994) idea that sovereign states in the international system are involved in collective identification, a sense of belonging to a larger group of individuals/states with common concerns and goals, along with national identities and self-interests constructed based on domestic and international factors. The collective interests of the two blocs, largely defined by the US and the Soviet Union, were constructed based on shared systems of values and beliefs that interacted through social relations among the states of the international community in the context of the Cold War (Wendt, 1994, p. 386).

Exposed to Soviet and German threats during World War II, Türkiye ruled out the possibility of a military attack and, thanks to its "active neutrality," avoided further losses to the state. After the war, the emergence of the Western world and its liberal ideology as the victor ignited in Turkish leaders the desire to secure an important place for Türkiye in the new order. The polarization of the world through collective identification brought both benefits and risks to Türkiye, given its geostrategic location important to both the East and the West. Steele notes that "An agent is ontologically secure when they choose a course of action comfortable with their sense of self-identity" (2005, p. 526). In a similar logic, Türkiye viewed the ideological Cold War as an opportunity to realize the old dream of Westernization. The question, however, is whether the Soviet threat was the real trigger or rather a pretext for consolidating Western-Turkish relations. According to Deringil, the Soviet threat seemed to be used as a means of fear that pushed the country in this direction (2014, pp. 252-253). Leffler (1985) suggests that the US and even Turkish officials while acknowledging Soviet demands over the Turkish Straits, considered military action from the country unlikely. The perception of a Soviet threat was based on congruence between US strategic interests, including the Soviet advance toward the region, and Türkiye's geostrategic importance in the Mediterranean and Middle East regions. Although Türkiye's security was not guaranteed in the event of an attack, it had been admitted to NATO and was militarily equipped by the alliance to prevent potential neutrality and counter the Soviet advance toward the south (Leffler, 1985).

Alongside the US factor, the historical background of repeated wars, as well as ideological and cultural differences, also played a role in Turkish-Soviet relations. Distrust of communism and fear of the Soviet military threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Turkish state among nationalist and religious segments of society contributed to the perception of the Soviets as the 'other' in Turkish political life (Örnek, 2015). In 1953, following Türkiye's accession to NATO, the Soviet Union announced in a note to the country its intention to relinquish claims to Kars, Ardahan, and the Straits, and to restore and normalize bilateral relations (Aktas, 2006). Despite Soviet calls for rapprochement and offers of economic assistance, the Menderes government did not easily deviate from its pro-American stance (Tellal, 2000). During this period, anti-communist sentiment was mostly used as an ideological tool to consolidate Türkiye's position in Western civilization, seen by Turkish policymakers as the ultimate winner of the ideological clash. This aligns with the argument that "Faced with such anxieties, actors may actually find solace in perpetuating the conflict and the securitized identities

on which it rests" (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017, p. 7). According to Özkan, the government-induced "myth of the Soviet threat" served as a catalyst for the creation of a collective anti-communist identity in the Turkish public and as a tool to strengthen its position in domestic politics (2020, p. 161). Under İnönü, for example, pro-Western and anti-Soviet propaganda was disseminated in the country's press with the help of nationalist and anti-communist intellectuals under the control of the government, guided by its official ideology, Kemalism, a Western-oriented secular ideology (Deringil, 2014). In short, Turkish foreign policymakers sought stability through routine relations with the West and the consolidation of Western identity, a quest pursued for more than two centuries. This tendency was, therefore, reactive and reflexive, "to adapt routines and identities to new situations" (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017, p. 14). Besides top officials, the predominantly Muslim public and Islamist groups developed a sense of hatred for communism and launched an ideological war against its attitude toward religion. As an alternative to a secular, in many ways depressed Europe, the US was accepted as an antidote to the Soviets in the discourse of the "infidel" and the "red menace" (Örnek, 2015).

Although Turkish-Soviet relations showed signs of softening with Stalin's death and the abandonment of territorial claims on Türkiye, it was not easy due to the nature of Turkish-American relations at the time, rather than solely Türkiye's security concerns. Furthermore, Türkiye's attempt to reach out to the Soviets with economic concerns was not welcomed by the US (Aktaş, 2006). For Hale, countering the Soviet threat, while acknowledging its utilization, rather than embracing liberal values, was the driving force behind Türkiye's increasing political and security ties with the West (2013, p. 79). Others, such as Özkan (2020) and Bozdağlıoğlu (2003), claim that the magnitude of the Soviet threat is exaggerated because it is used as an excuse to come under the Western umbrella, a behavior in line with Mitzen's statement that "states become attached to their conflict because its routines sustain identity" (2006a, p. 354). In other words, aligning with the US and taking an anti-Soviet stance was not only a response to security threats but also a way for Türkiye to position itself as part of Western civilization and contribute to its sense of identity. Türkiye's self-identification with the Western world shaped its narrative accordingly since "ontological security is intricately related to the processes of memory, narrative, and action" (Steele, 2008, p. 17). As Bozdağlıoğlu (2008, p. 55) explains, "Throughout its modern history, Türkiye has fully identified itself with Europe and established close relations with the United States." For example, by stating that "America and Türkiye are friends with the same ideals," President Bayar positioned his country among the Western powers (Bora, 2002, p. 154).

Conclusion

The concept of ontological security in IR theory is used to understand how nation-states strive to maintain a stable and consistent self-identity. It also provides insights into the seemingly irrational actions of nation-states that expose themselves to physical threats to ensure the security of their identity. This study benefited from the ontological security approach to analyze the Western orientation of Turkish foreign policy in the early years of the Cold War, using Americanism as an example. In line with its

traditional pursuit of building and maintaining a Western identity and securing a place among Western countries, Türkiye adapted its foreign policy to align itself with the US-led Western world, even when this conflicted with its physical security interests. By forming an alliance with the Western world against the Soviet-led Eastern world in the face of external challenges, Türkiye sought to institutionalize its relations with the West to demonstrate its commitment to the international community and Western values. However, this alignment was driven not only by the desire to protect its national security and political and economic interests but also to consolidate its modern state identity and status within the international system. Consistently, the anti-communist stance and the policy of distancing itself from the Soviets were sometimes used as tools to define ideological boundaries. Consequently, Turkish foreign policymakers not only sought to avoid the physical threats to its national security but also tended to develop a sense of ontological security in the Cold War context.

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