

TURKEY'S DECLARATION OF WAR ON JAPAN AT THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR*

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The title of this paper may sound rather odd because the historical relations between Turkey and Japan have been relations of friendship and cooperation. In fact, these two nations have never fought a war against each other. However, there is one case where Turkey declared war against Japan towards the end of the Second World War. It should be mentioned, however, that this declaration was a purely diplomatic and symbolic gesture on Turkey's part having absolutely no military bearing. In actual fact, not a single shot was fired between the two nations before or after this declaration of war.

The purpose of this paper is to present the developments leading to the declaration of this "un-fought" war. A brief description of events which followed this declaration will also be given. I must admit that I am not an historian and I have no intention of pretending to be one. What I will attempt is to summarize the relevant facts in an –hopefully– organized manner. While doing this, I will offer some comments and interpretations, if I may.

*This paper was presented to the 6th National Congress of the Social Sciences, Turkish Social Sciences Association, Ankara, 1999.

But first of all, I think it would be useful to remind ourselves of some basic fact about the history of relations between the Republic of Turkey and Japan: The Republic of Turkey declared its independence on October 29, 1923, and Japan was among the first nations to recognize it in 1924. Thus, from the very beginning of the Republican era in Turkey, Japan was regarded as a country friendly to Turkey. Japan established an Embassy in Turkey in March 1925 and the Republic of Turkey opened an Embassy in Japan in July 1925. The 1930 Commerce and Navigation Treaty concluded between the two countries and signed in Ankara on October 11, 1930,¹ contributed to the development of friendly relations between Japan and Turkey.

From the very outset of the Second World War, Turkey pursued a policy which has been aptly called by Selim Deringil, “*denge oyunu*” (the game of balance)² or “active neutrality”.³ This policy aimed at remaining outside of the war which had actually reached the very borders of Turkey when Greece and Bulgaria were occupied by German armed forces. However difficult as it might have been, this policy was successfully implemented under President İsmet İnönü and Turkey never engaged in actual combat. “From 1939 to 1945 Turkey came under direct pressure from at least three major powers. Britain, Germany and the Soviet Union all brought strong pressure to bear on Turkey to pursue a policy in keeping with their interest. Not only did Turkey avoid involvement but she was able to influence both warring camps in her favour. Turkish leaders such as İnönü and Menemencioğlu were able to accomplish this because they practiced realistic power politics.”⁴ The Soviet leader Stalin was reported to have said at the Yalta Conference, referring to Turkey, that certain nations had “Wavered and speculated on being the winning side.”⁵ I think this was an incorrect observation. In fact, by implementing

¹Ratified by the Turkish Parliament March 26, 1931; Law No. 1792, *Resmi Gazete*, April 5, 1931.

²S. Deringil, *Denge Oyunu*, İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1994.

³S. Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War; An 'Active' Neutrality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁵Yalta Papers, Fifth Plenary Meeting, February 8, 1945, cited E. Weisband,, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 300. See also Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 178.

realistic power politics Turkey achieved both of her objectives; firstly, staying out of actual combat and secondly, joining the winning side at the end.

When in the middle of 1944 it became apparent that the war in Europe would be ended by the defeat of Germany, relations between Britain and Turkey became increasingly closer under the Tripartite Treaty signed in 1939. This may explain the obvious British and American influence on the decisions subsequently taken by the Turkish government and Parliament. In August 2, 1944 Turkey severed diplomatic and trade relations with Germany. This diplomatic move was followed, about five months later, in January 3, 1945 by another decision taken by the Turkish government under which diplomatic and trade relations with Japan severed.

It was obvious that the Turkish government was influenced by Britain and supported by the U.S.A. in making both of these decisions. In a dispatch from Ankara, addressed to the Secretary of State, U.S. Ambassador Steinhardt pointed out that he had told Mr. Hasan Saka, the new Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Allies wanted Turkey to sever relations with Japan. Mr. Saka quite reluctantly agreed. The Turkish Minister said that there was no advantage to the Turks in doing this, "but that if Turkey's allies believed such action profitable", Turkey would certainly oblige.⁶ Although official sources and the government controlled press, declared that the severing of diplomatic and trade relations did not mean war, it was evident, and later proved, that this was indeed the case; only a few months later Turkey declared war against Germany and Japan simultaneously. As for the consequences and reactions to the decision of severing relations with Japan, there is very little reflected in the Turkish press of the time. However, there is one point which is quite interesting: The satisfaction expressed by the Chinese government on Turkey's decisions was given extensive coverage by the Turkish press. The Chinese Embassy in Ankara appears to have been quite active in giving cocktails and tea parties to celebrate the decision which was regarded by the Chinese as "a further step to push Japan into isolation". According to the press

⁶Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, p. 297.

reports the Turkish Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence were among the participants in these parties.⁷

Severing diplomatic and trade relations was followed by a declaration of war against both Japan and Germany on February 23, 1945. Under the Constitution, the declaration of war was within the competence of the Parliament, where all the 401 members, present at the plenary session, unanimously approved the government's proposal. The direct relationship between this declaration and the decisions taken at the Yalta Conference by the three main Allies fighting against the Axis was quite obvious.⁸ In his speech at the Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hasan Saka, clearly stated that the Government's proposal for declaration of war against Germany and Japan had been inspired by the British Government under the decisions taken at the Yalta Conference. The minister's speech was covered rather extensively by the "The Times" of London the next day:

Turkey has declared war on the Axis. Ankara radio stated last night that the decision was taken unanimously by the Grand National Assembly, which met in plenary session yesterday afternoon, in accordance with Article 19 of the Constitution. The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated at the meeting that on February 20, the British Ambassador had discussions with him and in the name of his

⁷'Türk Japon münasebetlerinin kesilmesi, Çin'de büyük memnuniyetle karşılandı', *Cumhuriyet*, 11 January 1945; 'Çin Elçiliğinde verilen çay ziyafetleri' s. 1 *Cumhuriyet* 20 Ocak 1945, p. 3.

⁸The Yalta Conference was convened in the Crimea, USSR on February 4 and lasted until February 11, 1945. The participants were the U.S.A. (represented by President Roosevelt), Great Britain (represented by Prime Minister Churchill) and the host country USSR (represented by Marshal Stalin). During the Yalta Conference, Stalin, who did not appear to have sympathies towards the policy of neutrality Turkey had pursued during the war, raised the issue of the membership in the envisaged United Nations. Although Turkey had already severed her diplomatic and trade relations with Germany and Japan, Stalin still was not satisfied. During the discussions on the requirements of admissibility to the envisaged United Nations as a member, he expressed certain objections for Turkey's membership. In response to Stalin, President Roosevelt stated that 'only those nations that had declared war on Germany should be granted the status of an Associated Nation and suggested March 1945 as the deadline for the yet uncommitted to declare war on Germany.' On the other hand, Churchill defended Turkey pointing out that if a large group of hitherto uncommitted nations were to declare war at that time, it would have negative effect on Germany's morale. See Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, pp. 299-300.

Government handed to the Minister a memorandum, in which it was stated that, in accordance with the decision of the Crimean conference, taken by the three great allied leaders, those nations would be qualified as associated nations by the side of the United Nations who declared war on the Axis Powers before March 1, 1945.⁹

The general feeling in Turkey was that the declaration of war against Germany and Japan was procedural requirement for admittance to the United Nations. The consequences of Turkey's declaration of war against Japan may, very briefly, be summarized as follows:

According to press reports, the Japanese government announced that Japan would declare war against Turkey in response to the Turkish declaration. The press reports indicated that the Japanese Foreign Ministry had started to take the necessary measures with regard to the declaration of war against Turkey.¹⁰ After Turkey's declaration of war on Japan, some articles appeared in Turkish newspapers describing the Japanese as having "inferior capacities". Although very few in number, these articles represented a definite change of direction from the traditional admiration and praise for the Japanese. The following is an example taken from one of these clearly racist and awkward articles: 'The Japanese have certain flaws inherent to their race difficult or impossible to correct. For example, because of the formation of their eyes and brain they are not able to become as expert pilots as Americans.'¹¹

The author of this clumsy article was a retired army general who was known for his admiration of Wehrmacht. He used to publish analyses on the developments of war in daily newspapers reflecting his pro-German tendencies. In the beginning of 1945, he appears to have changed the direction of his admiration from Germans to Americans. He uses the Japanese as a tool by which he expresses his admiration for the United States. Here is another quotation from his racist and

⁹*The Times*, February 24, 1945 (late London edition), p. 4.

¹⁰*Ulus*, February, 25, 1945, p. 1.

¹¹H.E. Erkilet; 'Japonya'yı malubiyete sürükleyen amiller', *Cumhuriyet*, January 10, 1945, p. 2. For another article translated from the *New York Times* see *Cumhuriyet*, 'Can Japan withstand?' February, 28, 1945, p. 2.

unscrupulous article: 'The Japanese lack even half of the American's magical creative and entrepreneurial abilities.'

This kind of clumsy and racist remarks about the Japanese in the newspapers did not appear to have been appreciated by the Turkish public opinion. The number of such articles was very small and they could accuse very little if any anti-Japanese feelings among the Turkish people. It should be noted, however, that the Hollywood movies about the war in the Pacific, where the Japanese were always depicted as inferior to Americans, had a certain impact on the younger generation in Turkey. These films were made easily available to the movie house owners in Turkey during the last years of the war when the audience did not have much choice. The number of Japanese living in Turkey in January 1945 when Turkey severed diplomatic and trade relations with Japan was already very small. The Japan Travel Agent Office and the Information Office had been closed about two years prior and all their personnel had left Turkey. There were no Japanese businessmen left in Turkey. Only people with diplomatic and consular status remained, numbering about fifteen. They were interned at the Consulate building in Ayazpaşa, İstanbul.¹² Some people who lived in the neighbourhood at that time remember that the interned Japanese nationals were permitted to go to Yıldız Park for a walk from time to time. Otherwise, the terrace of the consular building was used for that purpose.

The Japanese Peace Treaty was signed in San Francisco on 8 September 1951 by the United States, Japan and 47 other nations including Turkey. Thus, the state of war between Japan and 48 nations was officially terminated and Japan's sovereignty was restored as of 28 April 1952. Turkey soon after reopened its Embassy in Japan in June 1952. In April 1958 the Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes made an official visit to Japan. This visit was followed by a visit of Prince and Princess Mikasa to Turkey. Since then, and in particular, after the 1980s, there has been wide ranging inter-action between Japan and Turkey in various fields including economic cooperation and cultural exchange.

¹²*Cumhuriyet*, January, 5, 1945, p. 1; and January, 9, 1945, p. 3.