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# Turkish-Arab Relations in the Axis of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Israel State

## *Filistin Meselesi ve İsrail'in Kurulması Ekseninde Türk-Arap İlişkileri*

### Abstract

The question of Palestine began when Jewish immigrants settled in Palestine from the 1880s and formed large colonies on the land they purchased, and it evolved into a chronic problem with the establishment of the State of Israel.

The recognition of Israel's independence by Türkiye induced intense reactions in the Arab Middle East and sabotaged the development process of Turkish-Arab relations. Following this act of recognition, Türkiye quickly became distanced to the region and despite all the moves attempted afterwards, Türkiye failed to erase its scars and the desired level of relations could not be achieved. Moreover, the impact of Türkiye's recognition of Israel was deeply felt in the Cyprus issue that emerged in the 1960s, and Türkiye was deprived of the support of the Arab States in this vital question. Considering this recognition and the question of Palestine as a whole, it is understood that Türkiye's abandonment of its stance in support of the Arabs is a concrete indicator of its inconsistency in its foreign policy.

In this article, the author aims to examine and clarify the question of Palestine and the impact of the foundation of Israel State on Turkish-Arab relations.

**Key words:** Israel, Türkiye, Palestine, İsmet İnönü, Foreign Policy.

### Öz

Filistin meselesi, Yahudi göçmenlerin 1880'li yıllardan itibaren Filistin'e yerleşmeleri ve satın aldıkları topraklar üzerinde büyük koloniler oluşturmalarıyla başlamış ve İsrail Devleti'nin kurulmasıyla da kronik bir soruna dönüşmüştür.

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Türkiye'nin İsrail'in bağımsızlığını tanınması, Arap Orta Doğusunda yoğun tepkilere sebep olmuş ve Türk-Arap ilişkilerinin gelişme sürecini sabote etmiştir. Bu tanıma ile Türkiye, bölgeden süratle uzaklaşmış ve sonradan yaptığı bütün hamlelere rağmen, bunun izleri silinememiş, ilişkilerde istenilen seviye yakalanamamıştır. Ayrıca, Türkiye'nin İsrail'i tanınmasının etkisi, 1960'lı yıllarda ortaya çıkan Kıbrıs meselesinde derinden hissedilmiş ve bu hayati meselesinde Türkiye, Arap Devletlerinin desteğinden mahrum kalmıştır. Bu tanıma ve Filistin meselesi bir bütün olarak değerlendirildiğinde Türkiye'nin Arapları destekleyen tutumundan vazgeçmesi, dış politikasındaki tutarsızlığının somut bir göstergesi olmuştur.

Bu makalede Filistin meselesi ve İsrail'in kurulmasının Türk-Arap ilişkilerine etkisi incelenmeye ve açıklanmaya çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İsrail, Türkiye, Filistin, İsmet İnönü, Dış Politika.

## Introduction

The recognition of Israel by Türkiye in 1949 was a concrete sign that it has parted ways with the Arab world. This situation was perceived as a milestone not only in the Middle Eastern Arab world, but also in the entire Muslim world. The act of recognition would constitute the biggest breaking point in Turkish-Arab relations, in other words, in Türkiye-Middle East relations. The recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel have created a privative impact on Turkish-Arab relations, caused Türkiye to part ways with Arab countries on the question of Palestine, and put Türkiye's relations with the Middle Eastern Arab States into a process of rupture.

On the other hand, Türkiye's relations with the Middle Eastern countries have improved to the extent that they could get closer to the Arabs on the question of Israel, which is the main factor in their relations with the Middle Eastern countries. In this context, Türkiye's post-1965 policy, which can be denominated pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli, had a positive response in the Arab world, and Arabs and Muslims sided with Türkiye after the 1974 Cyprus military intervention and the American embargo.

## Basic Characteristics of Foreign Policy of İnönü's Era

The developments taking place after 1939 can also be called a transition process in which a new era is shaped and subsequently announced in terms of international relations. This era, which recorded the loss of Europe's global power status and enabled the emergence of two new superpowers such as the USA and the USSR, can also be referred to as the unfinished reckoning in the post-World War I period and the end of European supremacy<sup>1</sup>.

The developments in the international arena during this era paved the way for the

1 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "1939-1949 Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası, Uluslararası Durum", *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-2008)*, Ed. Haydar Çakmak, Barış Platin Yayınları, Ankara 2008, s. 249; Erdem Karaca, "Londra Basın Ataşeliği Raporları Işığında İkinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrası İngiliz Siyasetinde Bir Gündem Olarak SSCB", *Avrasya Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2020, C. 8, S. 24 (Özel sayı), s. 140.

Second World War. Although Türkiye signed an alliance agreement with the status quo states of England and France in 1939, its credibility was shaken in the eyes of the Allied Powers once Türkiye chose to remain neutral in the Second World War. In the post-World War II period, the threat of the USSR to Türkiye became the main problem in Turkish foreign policy. The perception of the USSR as a threat has caused Türkiye to become overly dependent on the West in terms of international relations<sup>2</sup>.

İsmet İnönü was elected President immediately after Atatürk's death in 1938 and remained in the office until 1950, when the Democratic Party came to power. Beyond being Atatürk's closest comrade-in-arms, İnönü is the country's «National Chief» and the person who signed the Treaty of Lausanne and the Armistice of Mudanya. Moreover, he is the «Second Man» of the Republic as defined by Aydemir<sup>3</sup>. The presidency of İnönü coincided with a period when tension reached the highest peak in the international arena and turned into war in September 1939. During the İnönü's era, the model of the importance and weight of a single leader in both foreign and domestic politics was maintained. The most important change in the foreign policy mechanism during this period was that İnönü replaced Tefik Rüşti Aras, who served as the foreign minister for 13 years between 1925-38, with Şükrü Saraçoğlu as soon as he took office<sup>4</sup>.

Half of İnönü's 12-year presidential term, that is, six years, coincided with the Second World War between 1939-1945, thus, this period was identified with the war, and İnönü was almost engaged in foreign policy and spent a large part of his efforts in foreign policy during this period. Perhaps the most important characteristic of Turkish foreign policy in the İnönü's era is that it is not different from the one pursued in the Atatürk's era<sup>5</sup>. The ruling team of this period, in which foreign policy evolved into a new form, was a generation that lived through the most important phases of Türkiye's recent history. The periods of Union and Progress, the First World War, the War of Independence and the founding of the Republic constituted the historical accumulation of this ruling elite. Such an accumulation of knowledge would have a great influence on their future foreign policy decisions, and their past experiences would guide them in many ways<sup>6</sup>. The Turkish foreign policy of the İnönü era was predominantly determined by İnönü and this ruling elite, who were familiar with the war and therefore feared war, and İnönü came to the fore in this elite both as a soldier who had fought for years and established the state with weapons and as an individual with extraordinary diplomacy experience such as Lausanne<sup>7</sup>. In addition, the friendship treaties signed during Atatürk's era were also effective in keeping Türkiye out

2 Hasan Duran, Ahmet Karaca, «Tek Parti Dönemi Türk-Arap İlişkileri», *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, c. XVI/S. 3 (Yıl: 2011), s. 209.

3 Gökhan Koçer, «İnönü ve CHP'nin Dış Politika Anlayışı», *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-2008)*, Ed. Haydar Çakmak, Barış Platin Yayınları, Ankara 2008, s. 254.

4 İlhan Uzgel, «Türk Dış Politikasının Oluşturulması», *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı'ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler ve Yorumlar*, Ed. Baskın Oran, C. I, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2008, s. 74-75.

5 Koçer, «a.g.m.», s. 254.

6 Selim Deringil, *Denge Oyunu*, İstanbul 2003, s. 57.

7 Koçer, «a.g.m.», s. 254.

of the war during the Second World War<sup>8</sup>.

Since Türkiye was in a position to change the course of the war due to its geographical and strategic location, the states combating in the Second World War put incredible pressure on Türkiye to use its neutrality in line with their own war strategies. Because of the sensitivity of its strategic position, both the Allied and Axis blocs were obligated to respect to the friendship of Türkiye, therefore, Ankara was able to resist these pressures and remained neutral until the last moments of the war<sup>9</sup>.

Türkiye did not take part in the Second World War. However, it cannot be claimed that Türkiye's position during the war was also a complete "neutrality". In terms of the law of nations, Türkiye remained neutral during the war, however, when the war came to an end, Türkiye broke its neutrality to become a member of the UN, declaring war on the side of the Allies, meaning nothing more than on paper<sup>10</sup>.

Türkiye's policy during this period was to stay out of this war at all costs<sup>11</sup>, and for this purpose, it adopted various strategies, developed relations with countries in different ranks when necessary, and acted as a rope walker during this war, so to speak. As defined by Deringil, this is a "play of equilibrium" for Türkiye and the main actor of this play is İsmet İnönü<sup>12</sup>.

As mentioned above, the foundations the foreign policy practices of the İnönü's era are based on the foreign policy principles formed by Atatürk<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the foreign policy of Atatürk's era continued without any major change. The idea of joining the Western alliance emerged instead of just adopting a sense of neutrality. The sense of neutrality was abandoned by joining the Western alliance. As a matter of fact, the sense of making an alliance with the West is an action left over from the foreign policy of Atatürk's era<sup>14</sup>.

Thanks to the foreign policy pursued in the Second World War, İnönü literally saved Türkiye from a great disaster. Although there were -very limited- criticisms that Türkiye's de facto non-participation in the war, caused Türkiye to lose and miss some opportunities, Türkiye, as a young state, did not face the pain experienced by other states of the world thanks to the policy pursued by İnönü. It was harder to stay out of the Second World War, the biggest and bloodiest war in history, than combating in it, and Türkiye was able to accomplish this challenge<sup>15</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the Second World War, one of the toughest foreign policy tests faced by the young Republic of Türkiye, a small ruling elite that guided foreign policy within the

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8 Duran, Karaca, *a.g.e.*, s. 209.

9 Süleyman Seydi, "İngiliz Özel Hareket Birimi'nin II. Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında Türkiye'deki Faaliyetleri", *Türkler*, c. XVI (Ankara, 2002), s. 823.

10 Koçer, "a.g.m.", s. 254.

11 Necdet Ekinci, "İnönü Dönemi ve II. Dünya Savaşı Yılları", *Genel Türk Tarihi*, C. IX, Ankara 2002, s. 646.

12 Koçer, "a.g.m.", s. 255.

13 Duran, Karaca, *a.g.e.*, s. 209.

14 Duran, Karaca, *a.g.e.*, s. 211.

15 Koçer, "a.g.m.", s. 255-256.

political logic of the single party period managed to keep Türkiye out of the war in line with its goals by adopting a rational and subtle policy against the mutual influence and pressure of the Axis and Allied powers<sup>16</sup>. In the Second World War, Türkiye was the only country that successfully materialized the policy of non-war without firing a single bullet, in other words, the temporary neutrality strategy. It would be possible to understand İnönü from the following response he gave to a child, who claimed that, they had starved during the war period: “I may have left you without food; however, I have not left you without a father”<sup>17</sup>.

On the other hand, Türkiye made important attempts to integrate with the international system after the war and concluded these attempts in a short time. Being a founding member of the UN in 1945, Türkiye, became a member of the Council of Europe established in 1949, thus received confirmation that it is a country governed by parliamentary democracy, so to speak. Türkiye also applied to join the North Atlantic Pact (NATO), which was established on the same date, but membership took place in 1952, after the Korean War, during the Democratic Party period. However, there were also criticisms that relations with the United States created a unilateral dependency. For instance, Marshall Aid received within the framework of the Truman Doctrine is a controversial foreign policy phenomenon<sup>18</sup>.

### **Türkiye’s Politics Towards Arab States During the İnönü’s Era**

After the Second World War, the following seven Arab countries were independent: Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. On March 22, 1945, these states convened<sup>19</sup> and signed the Charter of the Arab League with the aim of protecting their freedom and sovereignty and uniting their political, military, economic and social powers in the face of the colonial policies maintained by states such as Italy and France<sup>20</sup>. As the first state to fight against Western imperialism, Türkiye welcomed these initiatives by the other states, most of which had fought for independence against Britain or France. The Secretary General of the Arab League also made statements underscoring the importance of Turkish-Arab friendship<sup>21</sup>.

In the following period, Türkiye made efforts to improve its bilateral relations with Arab states. First, Iraqi Prince Regent Abdullah visited Ankara on September 15, 1945, and then, on March 29, 1946, the Treaty of Friendship and Neighborly Relations was signed between Türkiye and Iraq. Türkiye recognized the independence of Syria and Lebanon on

16 Mücahit Özçelik, “İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türk Dış Politikası”, *Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, S. 29 (2010/2), s. 267.

17 Cumhur Mumcu, “Türkiye’nin Savaş Dışı Kalma Çabaları ve Müttefiklerin Tutumu”, *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-2008)*, Ed. Haydar Çakmak, Barış Platin Yayınları, Ankara 2008, s. 276.

18 Koçer, “a.g.m.”, s. 256; The BENELUX (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg) union, founded on July 18, 1932, is the first economic integration initiative in Western Europe on the way to a peaceful era. Turkey has been a close follower of this process as well as its relations with the USA. Bkz. Erdem Karaca, Mehmet Özalper, “Avrupa ve Avrupa Birliği”, *Turgut Özal’ın Türkiyesi*, Ed: M. Alica, S, Aşık, M. Özalper, Gazi Kitabevi Yay., Ankara 2022, s. 177-179.

19 Melek Fırat, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “Orta Doğu’yla İlişkiler”, *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı’ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler ve Yorumlar*, Ed. Baskın Oran, C. I, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2002, s.616.

20 Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “Arap Birliği”, *DİA*, C. III, s. 325.

21 Fırat, Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 616.

March 6, 1946. On June 20, 1946, Lebanese President Bishara al-Khuri visited Türkiye. The Treaty of Friendship and Neighborly Relations signed on January 8, 1947, during the visit of King Abdullah of Jordan to Ankara, gave the first signs of separation between the Arab states, which would become clear later, as it coincided with the onset of the Cold War and the question of Palestine. King Abdullah's words; "We are now friends with the great Turkish nation in the East and Great Britain in the West" caused disturbances in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, especially in Syria, who were worried that Britain would not give up on its interests in the region and believed that there were efforts to form a new bloc in the London-Ankara-Amman triangle. In this context, the bipolar world order began to affect the Middle East, thus, parting the ways between Türkiye and the Arab world<sup>22</sup>.

After the end of the Second World War, Türkiye's indifference to the Arab world also continued, such that, Middle Eastern states, apart from Iran and Afghanistan, were not mentioned at all in the government program established by Prime Minister Recep Peker one year after the war and submitted to the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye on 14 August 1946<sup>23</sup>. Prime Minister Recep Peker, contented with sending a message of friendship to the Arab world with only a couple of sentences, expressed the following words: "Our love and friendship towards our Arab neighbors is infallible. It is our great ambition to thaw our relations with each of the Arab League States, the heirs of one of the richest civilizations in the world, in every field."<sup>24</sup>

These words of Prime Minister Recep Peker indicated that the relationship between Türkiye and the Arab world would be unable to go beyond the expectation of goodwill in those years.

In the years following the Second World War, the in-war honeymoon between the United States of America, the representative of the Western Bloc, and the Soviet Russia, the representative of the Eastern Bloc, soon ended and a Cold War period began. Since the United States feared the establishment of Soviet Russia's sovereignty and the spread of socialism in Europe, which was passing through a great destruction in those years, it prepared a recovery plan to primarily revive the economies of these countries. In a joint session of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on March 12, 1947, U.S. President Henry Truman called for supporting "free nations that seek to maintain their freedom under foreign pressure" after the war. After this proposal, which was referred to as the Truman Doctrine in history, the USA started to provide assistance to Western states in the first stage within the framework of this understanding of aid, and then started to spread this program to other developing countries, especially Türkiye and Greece<sup>25</sup>.

The draft of "Greek and Turkish Assistance Act", which was prepared in accordance with the main lines of the message Truman declared in the Congress, was adopted by the Senate on April 22, 1947, by the House of Representatives on May 9, 1947, and came into

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22 Fırat, Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 616-617.

23 İsmail Arar, *Hükümet Programları (1920-1960)*, İstanbul 1968, s. 9-162.

24 Arar, *a.g.e.*, s. 171.

25 Fahir H. Armaoğlu, *Türk-Amerikan Münasebetleri*, Ankara 1991, s. 158.

force on May 22, 1947, after being approved by President Truman<sup>26</sup>. According to this Act, the United States allocated a total of 400 million dollars of military aid, 300 million dollars of which was provided to Greece and 100 million dollars to Türkiye. This aid in the form of a grant was not in cash, but in the form of the transfer of military equipment of the USA to these two countries and was utilized between 1947-1949<sup>27</sup>. While the enactment of the Act led to severe reactions by the Soviet Union on the other hand, it was welcomed with great satisfaction by the Turkish Government<sup>28</sup>.

The United States of America aimed to take the place of the weakened Western dominance after the war in the Middle East, which is of great importance for both itself and the West, and especially due to involving oil reserves, to which the West and itself is highly dependent, and to take advantage of the emerging situation in its favor and to keep the Soviet Russia away from the region, therefore, USA felt obliged to shift the application area of the Truman Doctrine to this region as well. As the Middle East came under Soviet rule, the oil resources of the US and Western states could be controlled by this power, and the ideology of socialism could spread in this region. The establishment of Soviet sovereignty in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, in other words, the expulsion of the United States and Western states from the region, could have done great damage to the international prestige of the United States, both economically and politically. Even worse, it would have been impossible to revive the industries of Western states that had collapsed during the war. The United States was one of the states that would suffer the most from these developments. For these reasons, while the United States began to take an interest in the Middle East, it designed to take advantage of Türkiye's leadership and mediation power in dominating the region, as it knew that Türkiye is the heir of nearly four hundred years of domination in this region, the most powerful state in the region, and the foremost country in establishing relations with the West. Since this understanding, which began to evolve during the term of President İsmet İnönü, coincided with the policies that Türkiye wanted to implement, bilateral relations started to develop rapidly. Because Türkiye also turned to the USA during the war, and was among the founding members of the UN after participating in the San Francisco Conference held in 1945<sup>29</sup>.

### **Türkiye Attitude on the Question of Palestine and the Arab States**

In 1947, Britain decided to hand over the question of Palestine to the UN. The UN Special Committee for Palestine was established and decided in its report, which it gave mostly, as a result of its examination, that Palestine should be divided into two separate

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- 26 Mehmet Gönlübol, Cem Sar, "1919-1938 Yılları Arasında Türk Dış Politikası", *Olaylarla Türk Dış Politikası (1919-1995)*, Siyasal Kitabevi, Ankara 1996, s. 215.
- 27 Ramazan Gözen, "Truman Doktrini", *Türk Dış Politikası (1919-2008)*, Ed. Haydar Çakmak, Barış Platin Yayınları, Ankara 2008, s. 387.
- 28 Gönlübol, Sar, *a.g.e.*, s. 215-216.
- 29 Mustafa Albayrak, "Türkiye'nin Orta Doğu Politikaları (1920-1960)", *Fırat Üniversitesi Orta Doğu Araştırmaları Dergisi*, c. III/S. 2 (Elazığ, 2005), s. 9-10; As a result of the changing balances in the world, the USA and the USSR, which became two great powers with the Second World War, entered into a great competition to strengthen their economic and political positions in the Middle East. Bkz. Mustafa Bostancı, Erdem Karaca, "Bağdat Paketi'ne Etkisi Bakımından 1958 Irak Askeri Darbesi", *CTAD*, Yıl 14, S. 27 (Bahar 2018), s. 125-126.

states, Arab and Jewish, and that Jerusalem and its surroundings should be handed over to an international administration. The decision on partition was taken at the UN General Assembly on October 29, 1947, with 33 votes while there were 10 abstentions and 13 against votes<sup>30</sup>. The United States, the USSR and France voted in favor of the decision, while Britain abstained. Apart from Arab countries, Afghanistan, Cuba, Greece, India, Pakistan, Iran and Türkiye voted against the decision<sup>31</sup>. Thus, despite the opposition of the Arab countries, the Jewish People took an important step towards establishing their own independent state on the territory of Palestine and gained international support<sup>32</sup>. The Arabs were absolutely opposed to the partition of Palestine, whereas the Zionists accepted this decision because the Jews, who made up 30% of the population and possessed only 8% of the total surface area, were given 55% of Palestine<sup>33</sup>.

At this stage, Türkiye, which had signed friendship agreements with Jordan and Iraq and was extremely worried about Soviet ambitions in the developing Cold War conditions, took the side of the Arab countries in the UN negotiations on the question of Palestine in 1947 and pursued a path that openly defended the independence of Palestine. While the Arab states were calling for the immediate declaration of Palestinian independence, they were rejecting the proposed UN Special Committee on Palestine. Türkiye voted against the establishment of this committee and Hüseyin Ragıp Baydur, the Turkish representative in the Political Committee of the General Assembly, expressed following words during his speech at the General Assembly on May 8, 1947: “Türkiye shares the desire and inherent sensitivity of its Arab neighbors and wishes to see Palestine gain its independence in the very near future.” Thanks to these actions, Türkiye had a great impression on Arab countries<sup>34</sup>.

In this way, Türkiye pronounced the party they favored on this issue, sided with the Arab countries in the Palestinian negotiations at the UN, and supported the Arab countries’ proposals for the resolution to grant independence to Palestine. Also, Türkiye was one of the few countries that acted together with the Arab countries in the votes held on the establishment of an investigation committee by the UN General Assembly to examine the Palestine issue. During the negotiations on the reports of the Palestinian Committee, Türkiye supported the Arab countries and finally voted against the partition decision of the General Assembly on November 30 by siding with the Arab countries<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, the UN Special Committee on Palestine wanted to appoint England as arbitrator on the issue of partition; however, the UK turned down this offer and declared that it would end the mandate administration in Palestine as of 15 May 1948<sup>36</sup>.

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30 Peter Mansfield, *Osmanlı Sonrası Türkiye ve Arap Dünyası*, Çev. Nuran Ülken, Sander Yayınları, İstanbul Mayıs 1975, s. 137.

31 Ömer E. Kürkçüoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Arap Orta Doğusuna Karşı Politikası (1945-1970)*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, Ankara 1972, s. 21.

32 İrfan C. Acar, *Lübnan Bunalımı ve Filistin Sorunu*, TTK Yayınları, TTK Basımevi, Ankara 1989, s. 44.

33 Mansfield, *a.g.e.*, s. 137.

34 Özlem Tür, “Türkiye ve Filistin -1908-1948: Milliyetçilik, Ulusal Çıkar ve Batılılaşma”, *AÜSBF Dergisi*, S. 62-1, s. 247-248.

35 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 21-22.

36 Mansfield, *a.g.e.*, s. 137.



Türkiye, along with Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, voted against the resolution<sup>37</sup> in which both the US and the USSR voted for the partition of Palestine<sup>38</sup>, and also, Türkiye was one of the few countries that supported Arab countries, so this attitude gained importance and was welcomed among Arab countries. This positive reaction was expressed in the thank-you note sent to İnönü by Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli right after the UN voting process. On the other hand, in an article titled “To Those Who Defend Islam For A Thousand Years”, referring to the Turks, Al Qabas newspaper published in Damascus called on the “great defenders of Islam”, namely the Turks, to defend Palestine. While summarizing the reactions in the Arab press on this issue in a news from Beirut, Cumhuriyet Newspaper declared that the efforts and activities of the world states regarding the settlement of the question of Palestine were far from convincing and satisfying the Arab world and that Türkiye’s stance towards Arab and Palestinian causes was the only source of consolation and hope in this dark and hopeless situation<sup>39</sup>.

### Establishment of Israel and Attitude of the Parties

While the Middle East policy pursued by Türkiye developed in parallel with the Middle East policies of the West, it sometimes deviated from the Western countries due to historical and religious reasons, and a consistent and stable policy could not be put forward in general<sup>40</sup>. After becoming a founding member of the UN, Türkiye gradually started to approach the United States, and this process accelerated with the membership of the World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) on March 11, 1947, and the International Money Fund on March 12<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, US President Henry Truman provided aid to Türkiye in 1947 within the framework of the noted “Truman Doctrine”, and after this important support, first military aid and then economic aid was initiated by the United States to Türkiye in 1948, within the scope of the Marshall Plan. Therefore, Türkiye started to pursue a foreign policy compatible with USA<sup>42</sup>. As Türkiye entered into close relations with the West, its attitude towards Middle East developments started to change accordingly. Türkiye also approached the West; accordingly, it began to move away from the Arab countries it had supported until then in the Middle East<sup>43</sup>.

On May 14, 1948, the last British troops left Palestine and on the same day the establishment of Israel State was declared<sup>44</sup>. The State of Israel was recognized by the USA

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37 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 22-23.

38 Walter Hollstein, *Filistin Sorunu, Filistin Çatışmasının Sosyal Tarihi*, Çev. Cemal A. Ertuğ, Yücel Yayınları, İstanbul Nisan 1975, s. 214.

39 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 22-23.

40 Şerif Demir, “Dünden Bugüne Türkiye’nin Suriye ve Ortadoğu Politikası”, *Turkish Studies- International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, Volume 6/3 Summer 2011, p. 691-713, Turkey, s. 700.

41 Albayrak, *a.g.m.*, s. 10.

42 Erdal Şimşek, *Türkiye’nin Ortadoğu Politikası*, Kum Saati Yayıncılık, İstanbul Şubat 2005, s. 21

43 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 25.

44 Mansfield, *a.g.e.*, s. 138.

very shortly (11 minutes) after its establishment and by the USSR on 17 May<sup>45</sup>.

The establishment of Israel State was first met with concern in Türkiye. Ulus Newspaper, which is the semi-official body of the government, has declared that the establishment of the State of Israel has put a political problem in the Middle East, which is difficult to resolve, in a dead end. On the other hand, the State of Israel has also been viewed as a “new Soviet satellite” by the Turks<sup>46</sup>. However, this situation began to change with the UN General Assembly’s decision to establish a Conciliation Commission for Palestine on December 12, 1948, despite the opposition of Arab countries, when Türkiye voted in favor with Western countries and was elected to the Commission together with the United States and France<sup>47</sup>. In the formation of Commission by these three states, it was aimed to ensure that the work of the commission was balanced by adopting a pro-Jewish attitude in the USA, neutral attitude in France and pro-Arab attitude in Türkiye. However, apart from being pro-Arab, this attitude of Türkiye, which supported the establishment of this commission opposed by the Arab states and accepted the commission membership<sup>48</sup>, was the onset of the apathy that would last for many years with the Arab states<sup>49</sup>, and also gave the first signs of a change in attitude towards Israel’s independence<sup>50</sup>. Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, who represented Türkiye in the commission, even advised President İsmet İnönü that Türkiye should officially recognize Israel after his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, beyond maintaining his neutral line until the end of his commission works<sup>51</sup>. This was also the first sign of Türkiye’s pro-Israel policy in Palestine after the proclamation of the State of Israel<sup>52</sup>. It was understood that, contrary to popular belief, Israel was not a secret ally of the USSR, which was influential in Türkiye’s change of attitude on this issue. Israel did not hesitate to state that it was among the Western wing against the Soviet threat. In fact, Western states constituted the majority among the thirty states that established diplomatic relations with Israel. More importantly, the United States was the first state to recognize Israel. In this case, there was no vital obstacle for Türkiye to establish warm relations with Israel<sup>53</sup>. As a matter of fact, Minister of Foreign Affairs Necmettin Sadak, in his statement to the Anadolu Agency on February 8, 1949, declared that the State of Israel is a fact, it is recognized by more than thirty states, that Arab representatives also engaged in dialogue with Israeli representatives, and that Türkiye finds it more useful not to change

45 Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “Filistin Sorunu”, *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı’ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler ve Yorumlar*, Ed. Baskın Oran, C. I, İletişim Yayınları İstanbul 2008, s. 639.

46 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 31.

47 Fırat, Kürkçüoğlu, “Orta Doğu’yla İlişkiler”, s. 617.

48 Çağrı Erhan, Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “1960-1980 Dönemi Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler”, *Türk Dış Politikası, Kurtuluş Savaşı’ndan Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler ve Yorumlar*, Ed. Baskın Oran, C. I, İletişim Yay., İstanbul 2008,, s. 639-640.

49 Mustafa Yağbasan, Abdulsamet Günek, “Arap Medyasında Türkiye’nin Değişen Algısı”, *Yeditepe University, Global Media Journal-Turkish Edition*, Bahar 2010, c. I/S. I (İstanbul), s. 212.

50 Erhan, Kürkçüoğlu, “1960-1980 Dönemi Arap Devletleriyle İlişkiler”, s. 639-640.

51 Çağrı Erhan, “Türkiye’nin İsrail ile İlişkileri (1948-2001)”, *Türkler*, c. XVII (Ankara, 2002), s. 252.

52 Tür, *a.g.e.*, s. 249.

53 Erhan, *a.g.e.*, s. 252.

its situation in order to do its duty in the Conciliation Commission better<sup>54</sup>. Following these developments and after the UN recognized Israel on March 11, 1949<sup>55</sup>, Türkiye officially recognized Israel on March 28, 1949. Thus, Türkiye became the first Muslim country to recognize Israel<sup>56</sup>. The Turkish Government explained the rationale for its decision as “Israel has become a member of the UN, therefore, Türkiye has recognized this newly established state within the framework of the principle of the universality of the UN”<sup>57</sup>. President İsmet İnönü, on the other hand, expressed Türkiye’s view of Israel in the speech he delivered at the opening of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 1, 1949: “Political relations have been opened with the newly founded State of Israel. We hope that this state will be an element of peace and stability in the Near East”<sup>58</sup>. There is a reason behind this attitude in Türkiye, which was not adequately explained in the Arab world or the Arabs did not want to understand it. This reason can be explained as follows: Right after the Second World War, when the Soviet Union wanted Kars and Ardahan provinces to be left to them and wanted a base in the Straits, the USA took a protective stance against Türkiye. This type of backing and support was vital for Türkiye and it was inevitable for Türkiye to act sympathetically towards Israel, which the United States has long supported<sup>59</sup>.

Türkiye’s recognition of the State of Israel has been perceived as a milestone not only in the Middle Eastern Arab world but also in the entire Muslim world. In a special sense, this act of recognition would constitute the biggest breaking point in Turkish-Arab relations, in other words, in Türkiye-Middle East relations<sup>60</sup>. This recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries have created a privative impact on Turkish-Arab relations<sup>61</sup>, caused Türkiye to part ways with Arab countries on the question of Palestine,<sup>62</sup> put Türkiye’s relations with the Middle Eastern Arab States into a process of rupture<sup>63</sup>, and thus led to the developments after Türkiye recognition of the State of Israel did not justify the expectations of President İnönü<sup>64</sup>.

54 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 31-32.

55 Duran, Karaca, *a.g.e.*, s. 212.

56 Fırat, Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 617.

57 Meliha Benli Altunışık, “Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Türkiye-İsrail İlişkileri”, *Türkiye ve Ortadoğu-Tarih, Kimlik, Güvenlik*, Derleyen: Meliha Benli Altunışık, Boyut Yayıncılık, İstanbul 1999, s. 182.

58 Kürkçüoğlu, *a.g.e.*, s. 33.

59 İsmail Soysal, “Türk-Arap İlişkileri (1918-1997)”, *Çağdaş Türk Diplomasisi: 200 Yıllık Süreç*, Ankara, TTK, 15-17 Ekim 1997, Sempozyuma Sunulan Tebliğler, Yayına Hazırlayan: İsmail Soysal, TTK Basımevi, Ankara 1999, s. 521; for Russian demands bkz. Erdem Karaca, *Cumhuriyetin Teşekkülü Sürecinde Bitlis Vilâyeti/Kazası (1919-1950)*, Gece Kitaplığı Yay., Ankara 2020. s. 71.

60 Albayrak, *a.g.m.*, s. 10.

61 Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, “Türkiye ve İslam Konferansı Teşkilatı”, *Yeni Türkiye*, Yıl: 1/S. 1 (Kasım-Aralık 1994), s. 389.

62 Tür, *a.g.m.*, s. 249.

63 Duran, Karaca, *a.g.e.*, s. 212.

64 Albayrak, *a.g.m.*, s. 10.

## Conclusion

The recognition of Israel's independence by Türkiye has led to intense criticism in the Middle-Eastern Arab world and has been a major obstacle to the development of relations between the two worlds. At the same time, this recognition has dealt the heaviest blow to Türkiye's leadership role and its credibility in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Those who play for the leadership of the Arab world would use this recognition as a trump card against Türkiye, and this would be the biggest cause of distrust between the two sides. As a result of this act of recognition, Türkiye quickly moved away from the region in a political sense and despite all the efforts made afterwards, the traces of this event could never be erased and the desired development in the relations could not be achieved. At the same time, the recognition was quite effective in changing the perception of Türkiye as the ally of West in the region among the Arab public.

Türkiye began to move away from the Middle-Eastern Arab world and pursue Western-dependent policies upon recognizing Israel's independence. On the other hand, the impact of Türkiye's recognition of Israel would be felt deeply in the Cyprus issue that emerged in the 1960s and Türkiye would be deprived of the support of the Arab States on this issue. In addition, Türkiye's abandonment of its stance in support of the Arabs in the question of Palestine is a solid indication of the inconsistency dominant in Turkish foreign policy.

In conclusion, the change in attitude adopted towards Israel demonstrated that the general development in Turkish foreign policy after 1945, which emerged as a westward orientation, also affected Türkiye's Middle East policy towards the end of the 1940s.

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