

FROM NEUTRALITY TO ALIGNMENT: THE FORMATION OF NATO AND TURKISH BIDS FOR MEMBERSHIP

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Abstract

The formation of NATO was a response by the United States to the security questions of the Western Europe and North Atlantic region. Turkey also faced with a serious threat from the Soviet Union. Turkey's attempts of entering NATO shaped Turkish security policies as well as her relations with the rest of the world. Turkish membership to NATO can be regarded a solution to her security problems, but it may well be argued that the main cause behind that policy was the continuation of the policies of westernization and modernization. The obvious short term factor behind Turkish desire was the Soviet threat. But at the same time the ideological aspirations in becoming an integral part- at least in term of military alliance- of Western world without any doubt played a decisive role in Turkey's decision.

Özet

İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra Avrupa'da ortaya çıkan yeni güvenlik sorunları ve özellikle Batı Avrupa'ya da yönelen Sovyet tehdidine karşı ABD'nin öncülüğünde NATO ittifakı kuruldu. Aynı dönemde Türkiye'de kendisini Sovyet tehdidi altında görüyordu. Türkiye'nin NATO'ya girme çabaları Türkiye'nin güvenlik politikalarını ve Batı ile olan ilişkilerini de şekillendirdi. NATO üyeliği, Türkiye açısından, güvenlik sorunlarına bir çözüm olarak görülebilir, fakat bu üye olma arzusunun arkasında modernleşme ve batılılaşma ideolojisinin bulunduğunu söylemek de yanlış olmayacaktır. Kısa dönemde Sovyet tehdidine karşı koymanın hesapları yapılırken, uzun vadede Batı sisteminin ayrılmaz bir parçası olma arzusunun Türk karar alıcılarının temel düşüncesi olduğu söylenebilir.

Key Words

NATO, Security, Turkish Security Policies, Soviet Threat, Middle East, North Atlantic

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1. INTRODUCTION

The developments of the late 1940s were crucial to Turkey's subsequent relations and policies. Turkey's attempts of entering NATO shaped Turkish security policies as well as her relations with the rest of the world. Policies of transformation towards a western type of nation-state were carried out by Turkish Republic from the outset. As a result, westernization and modernization became the mainstream movement and direction from the early 1920s. Her postwar foreign policy, to some extent was a result of these developments. In early postwar period Turkey appealed to the west for the assistance and support against the Soviet threat. In early 1950s Turkey entered the Western security system. Turkish membership to NATO can be regarded a solution to her security problems, but it may well be argued that the main cause behind that policy was the continuation of the policies of westernization and modernization. In this article an attempt will be made to examine the process of the the formation of NATO and Turkish bids for membership.

2. DEVELOPMENT LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF NATO

The events which were taking place at the end of February 1948, especially, the communist coup in Prague had made a great impact on western countries as well as on the United States with regard to new security arrangements. In late 1947, the United States had no clear security plan for Western Europe (Kent and Young, 1992: 181). In contrast, The United Kingdom and France were seeking to form a federation between West European countries, including the United States.. The aim of the United Kingdom with such a federation was to convince the Soviet Union that they could not advance further west (Wiebes and Zeeman,1983: 352) In fact, even during the Second World War, the idea of a Western bloc embracing Britain and other Western European states was discussed in the British Foreign Office (Kent and Young, 1992:166). After 1947, the Brussels Treaty and later, the North Atlantic Treaty emerged as the interlinked means to secure Western Europe and North Atlantic region.

Meanwhile, in 1947 Turkey was promised assistance and aid by the United States. The Soviet Union was convinced that if Turkey and Greece were attacked, the United States would support them militarily (FRUS;1947:915). As a mark of that promise, an agreement

were signed at Ankara by Ambassador Wilson and Turkish Primer Saka, on June 12, 1947. Nevertheless, from 1948 American attention shifted from the Middle East, especially, the Northern Tier, to the Western Europe. The United States wished to give more emphasis to the security and integrity of the Western European countries underlined by the formation of NATO without the initial membership of Turkey and Greece. Meanwhile for the Middle East, Britain wanted to create a separate military structure which would possible include Turkey (Louis, 1984: 585). The British aims was to counter the American leadership of NATO, and to perpetuate their influence in the Middle East (Louis, 1984: 601). However, they realized that paradoxically the success of their Middle East strategy largely depended on American and Commonwealth military assistance (Aldrich and Zametica, 1992: 254).

After the breakdown of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London in December 1947, the United Kingdom and France agreed to form a sort of security arrangement including Benelux countries; Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. That idea was encouraged by the United States, who did not give any advance commitment in term of membership, but did offer assistance through armed forces (Aldrich and Zamerica, 1992: 352). After negotiations between parties, the Brussels Treaty was signed on March 17, 1948 with participating five states.

Soon after the Brussels Treaty was concluded, negotiation were started between the United States and Canada on the one hand and the Brussels powers on the other in order to form a pact for the North Atlantic region, possibly including Mediterranean. In fact as early as spring 1948 there was common understanding between the United States, Britain and Canada regarding the North Atlantic treaty which was realized a year later (Wiebes and Zeeman, 1983: 352). The West European powers now sought to bring about United States' support for the security of the Western Europe. The Americans were not willing to consider joining the Brussels Treaty, because it was seen as a likely vechile for the political unification of the West Europe and also some of its articles could not apply to the United States. But, the United States was eager to conclude the Nort Atlantic Traety (Folly, 1987: 179).

While the formation of North Atlandic Treaty was taking place, negotiations were focused on the North Atlantic. Borth, the Western European countries and the United States were looking to a security arrangement for that region (Folly, 1987: 179). One of the main problem is in the negotiations, which was also important for Turkey and Greece, was the

definition of the geographical periphery. The Ankara Government asked Britain and the United States about Turkey's position in the emerging security arrangements. Their answer was that, the new security arrangement would be a geographical one, restricted in scope to countries of the North Atlantic region. That response created disappointment in Turkey. It had been made clear that Turkey would not be included in the new pact, albeit at the same time, Turkey had been given assurances that further security arrangements would be made for the Mediterranean region (Erkin, 1986: 41).

It is worth noting that Italy could not be considered as a North Atlantic country, but nevertheless joined negotiations with the United States with regard to the formation of NATO. Predictably, there was disagreement between the participants over whether to include Italy or not because of her geographic location. It was argued, especially by Britain, that inclusion of Italy in an Atlantic Pact would have a negative effect on Turkey and Greece. France also wanted to include North Africa in NATO. Paris argued that a separate Mediterranean pact could be formed, in which, Italy, Greece and Turkey would participate. (106) Britain pressed for Italy to be included in Brussels Pact rather than NATO. But Washington insisted Italy should be included in the North Atlantic system (Folly, 1987: 180-81).

When Italy was brought into the North Atlantic Treaty, the geographical basis of the pact was altered and Turkey felt disappointed at her exclusion despite this Mediterranean aspect (Kaplan, 1984: 141-42). The inclusion of Italy created serious problems for Turkey. First of all, the Turkish public was disappointed. Secondly, the Turkish Government felt that the United States might now have second thoughts about the protection of Turkey, which meant that the independence and integrity of the country was in danger. Britain had already withdrawn her support for Turkey in terms of economic assistance. Turkey now feared that the United States might follow suit and asked the United States to clarify her intentions, and to confirm that Turkey's independence and integrity would be defended by the United States (FRUS, 1949: 1663).

It was now increasingly evident that Turkey enjoyed no special priority in the United States' foreign policy. American officials shifted attention towards Western Europe and gave priority to guaranteeing the security of these countries. In early 1949, the United States was committed to repel any attack on those countries, but such a promise was not given with

regard to Turkey. Turkey was merely given assurances by the United States and Britain that her importance to them had not changed (Henderson, 1982: 67).

In February 1949, even as NATO finalised, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Necmettin Sadak, visited London, Paris and Brussels in order to obtain support for Turkey's security arrangements within the Eastern Mediterranean region. Simultaneously, the Turkish Ambassador in Washington, Erkin, asked US support for a new regional pact (Erkin, 1986:49). The Americans were hesitant regarding the formation of a new pact for the region, later adopting a position of indifference. Thereupon a new idea was proposed by Britain at the moment of signature of the North Atlantic Treaty, suggesting that the parties should make a declaration that an attack on certain countries, particularly Greece and Turkey, would be a matter of grave concern calling for immediate consultation with a view of remedial action. Britain concluded that they had to help Turkey because she was important for the defence of the Middle East. Also, there was a separate treaty between them which required them to do so. But, except for the United States, no other NATO government had any wish to join in such a declaration (Henderson, 1982: 106). Although Turkey was not in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Britain's support to Turkey was now reaffirmed (Document on International Affairs, 1953: 79).

3. TURKEY'S ADMISSION INTO NATO

Although excluded from NATO initially, Turkey continued its drive for membership and finally joined NATO in early 1952. The failure of British attempts to create a separate command in the Middle East, the Korean War and the perceived threat posed by the Soviet Union to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East persuaded the US decision-makers that inclusion of Turkey in NATO would be crucial to the defence of the region.

While Turkey was not included in NATO when it was formed in April 1949, nevertheless Greece and Turkey were at the centre of an Anglo-American debate over whether the European or the Middle East theatre was more important (Devereux, 1990: 47). Turkey now shifted her policy with regard to a new pact, and concentrated her attention on obtaining the British and American's support for a pact for the Eastern Mediterranean region (FRO, FO, 371/78328-R2680).

Simultaneously, Turkey and Greece were still insisting on joining the North Atlantic Pact. Turkey formally requested Britain “to bear in mind the question of Turkish security at the London Conference” (BDPO, 281-283). But they could not obtain assurances from the United States against any Russian aggression. 127 This outcome did not satisfy Turkey. Turkey argued that Turkey and Greece could contribute to NATO and the defence of Europe to a greater extent than Luxembourg, Denmark or Holland, a view which also shared by American generals. In addition, both Greece and Turkey were already being given significant military assistance by the United States (Armstrong, 1951: 651).

For the United States the formation of a similar pact for the region was an alternative, but the inclusion of Turkey in NATO might involve fewer difficulties than the establishment of an entirely new organization. There were clear difficulties in forming a new pact, because Turkey’s relations with the most Arab states were poor and existence of Israel was a formidable obstacle for Arabs who wished to join such a pact.

Turkey’s accession to NATO also had a domestic dimension. Free elections were held in Turkey on May 14, 1950, and the Democrat Party, the leading opposition party, gained most of the seats. The Democrats did not intend to make any radical changes in Turkey’s external relations. Instead they were yet more eager to develop close links with the West and join NATO. The foreign policy of the new government was explained by the Foreign Minister, Fuat Köprülü: “our foreign policy, which has been oriented towards the west since the Second World War, will take a more energetic and active form in this direction” (Ahmad, 1977: 390). The opportunity to play a more energetic and active role was provided almost immediately by the outbreak of the Korean War in June, 1950.

The Korean War was the milestone in Turkey’s admission into NATO. Turkey was the second state that responded to the appeal of the United Nations to send troops, troops who achieved a brilliant record on the battlefield in Korea (Karpas, 1972: 353). Ankara’s response to the United Nations’ appeal was immediate, because it was perceived that such a policy would help, on the one hand, admission into NATO, and on the other, Korea confounded the sort of crisis which Turkey itself might soon face (Lefler, 1992: 425).

Accordingly, in early summer, 1950, Turkey applied, a second time, for the inclusion in NATO. The Turkish Foreign Minister, Fuat Köprülü, said in a press conference that the

North Atlantic Pact could not be completed unless Turkey and Greece were included. He emphasized that a region such as Eastern Mediterranean with immense strategic value could not be left outside the Western security system. Frustratingly, Turkey and Greece's applications were rejected by the Council of Deputies on 14 September 1950. At the same meeting, the American Secretary of State, Acheson, proposed an alternative plan suggesting that Turkey and Greece would be invited as associate members and participate in planning for defence of the Mediterranean region (Gönlübol and others, 1989: 228). That invitation was accepted by Turkey and Greece.

Nevertheless, Turkey's participation in Korean war made a real impact on the United States Government. American policy after the Korean war shifted gradually in favour of the admission of Turkey and Greece into the NATO, albeit the State Department was still reluctant to press the issue in face of the objections of other members of the pact. The United States' Air Force was strongly in favour of admission of Turkey since Turkey refused to consider installing air bases on her territory unless was admitted to the pact. It was argued by the Air Force that in the event of a Soviet attack on Western Europe, if Turkey was a member of NATO, United States bombers could attack the Trans-Caucasian oil fields, the industries of the Urals, and Russian supply lines from the Turkish bases (D.J.K., 1952: 163-64). 141 Nevertheless, American military officials now accepted that without Turkish cooperation it would be very difficult to prevent the Middle East falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. Also, they feared that exclusion of Turkey from NATO may result in a drift towards neutrality (Lefler, 1992: 420).

A crucial turning point came in February 1951. A second Chief of Mission Conference between American and Turkish military officials was held in Istanbul and the question of Turkey's admission was discussed once again. At that conference, American representatives were persuaded that Turkey sought strongly to join NATO and was becoming discouraged and was therefore considering alternatives courses of action. American's representatives informed the State Department that the United States could make a better agreement with Turkey when she was eager to join NATO. In addition, it was recognized that Turkish Armed forces could play a key role resisting Soviet advances in the Middle East (Lefler, 1992: 425).

Meanwhile, opposition of the other members were continued. Their arguments could be summarized as follows: Greece and Turkey would cause further enlargement. The natural

homogeneity of the pact would be broken. Its Christian and democratic character would be damaged. Many of the Atlantic Pact countries also feared that an increase in the number of participants would cut down the share of American armaments which each present member was due to receive (Armstrong, 1951: 660).

In May 1951, the United States formally proposed to the other members of NATO that Turkey and Greece should be admitted to full membership. The first objection to this proposal came from Scandinavia and the Benelux countries. They argued that the extension of the pact might drag them into a conflict in the Mediterranean in which they had no interest (D.J.K., 1952:163). Conversely, the United States wanted to strengthen NATO before considering a separate organization for the Middle East. Great Britain still wanted to form a completely separate security organization for the Middle East region, desiring a Middle East Command under the administration of Britain including some other Commonwealth countries (Aldrich and Zametica, 1992: 259). Britain finally gave her objections, but insisted on a Middle East defence plan within the framework of NATO and Turkey accepted the British plan in order to join NATO. Meanwhile the US ambassador at Ankara, George McGhee, had told his government that “Turkey should be admitted into NATO without any qualification and without any relationship to the Middle Eastern Command” (FRUS, 866).

Why did the United States shift her policy in favour of Turkey’s admission into NATO? To some extent the answer to this question is indicated by a report concerning the strategic importance of Turkey for American interests in the Middle East, set out in an American National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) in February 1951. It was concluded that Turkey would be a faithful ally and that she could play an important role in halting any future Soviet military aggression in the region. It was understood that Turkey would stand firm against the Soviet Union, and she could resist any Soviet invasion for a long time. Moreover, Turkey would support Western actions under UN directives as she was doing in Korea at the time (FRUS, 1119-1126). It has been said that “Turks are determined to resist Soviet expansion and to preserve their independence. The Turks have stood firm against Soviet and satellite pressure. Moreover, they have sought to ally themselves with the power or combination of powers most capable of resisting USSR (FRUS, 1121).

The issue of Turkey’s admission into NATO was thus on the Agenda for the meeting of North Atlantic Council held in Ottawa in July 1951. In that meeting the invitations to

Turkey and Greece were passed unanimously. A protocol admitting Greece and Turkey into NATO was signed by the Council of Deputies during mid October. 159 This went into effect on 15 February, 151 and thus, NATO's periphery extended to include Turkey and Greece. On 15 October, 1951, the text of the protocol providing for Turkey's and Greece admission into NATO was announced in NATO's London Office (Gönlübol, 1989: 231).

Relations between Turkey and the Soviet Union remained relatively calm during the period of Turkey's admission to NATO. Subsequently, in November 1951, the Soviet Union directed a note to Turkish Government protesting of participating in NATO. The Soviets asserted that "it is quite obvious that the invitation to Turkey, a country which has no connections whatever with the Atlantic, to join the Atlantic Bloc, can signify nothing but an aspiration on the part of imperialist states to utilize Turkish territory for the establishment on the USSR frontiers of military bases for aggressive purposes (McGhee,1990: 89). Turkey, in reply, stated that membership in NATO addressed a sense of insecurity created by Soviet threat (Gönlübol, 1989: 235).

Thus, Turkey obtained her objectives becoming a NATO member: confidence in defending her independence and integrity. Turkish membership of NATO constituted not only a security guarantee against the Soviet threat, but also acceptance into the Western community of nations. Thus, the conception of Westernization, implying cooperation with the West, became the leading philosophical principle of Turkey's foreign policy (Karaosmanoğlu,1988: 297). 165 At the same time, Turkey's bilateral relations with the United States developed rapidly. Many bilateral agreements were subsequently made between the two countries and Turkey became a close ally of the United States with regard to the Middle East. 166 A tendency to evaluate all international events through the perspective of NATO and the United States became the central characteristic of Turkish foreign policy during the next decade (Gönlübol, 1989: 311). Turkey, in all terms of military strategy and security, became an integral part of the Western alliance.

Whereas, for the United States and European NATO partners Turkey would be important in deterring any Soviet attack and as a threat to Soviet Union's southern flank (Kuniholm,1983: 423). Located in a vital geo-strategic position, Turkey could be used against the Soviet Union in a time of war (Boll,1979: 609).

4. CONCLUSION

Many factors drove Turkey's desire to join NATO. First of all Turkey was eager to enter a prestigious club. Secondly, the desire to become a westernized society was another factor which had an important impact on Turkey's willingness to integrate with NATO. Westernization and modernization formed an implicit link between strategy and other aims held in common with her new Western identity. The obvious short term factor behind Turkish desire was the Soviet threat. But at the same time the ideological aspirations in becoming an integral part- at least in term of military alliance- of Western world without any doubt played a decisive role in Turkey's decision. It is worth noting that at the time Turkey entered into NATO there was no imminent or explicit Soviet threat but, despite that, Turkey was increasingly ambitious to enter the pact.

Thus, Turkey has based her security and defence on the ties with the United States and the collective security system of the North Atlantic Alliance. Turkey's geographical importance to both the West and to the Soviet Union gave her a particular value in an East-West context.

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