

**RETHINKING TURKISH-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS A
COMPONENT OF THE TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY
TOWARDS THE USSR FROM THE COLD WAR
UNTIL TODAY**

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After the Second World War Turkey faced the dilemma of being a solitary state located in a hot region. The Turkish foreign policy based on being an "active neutral" during the course of the war did not provide Turkey a secure position that she can enjoy in the post-war politics. On the contrary, Turkey found herself rather alone located between the antagonist poles of East and West¹.

Turkey as a Solitary State: the late 1940s

After the war, as the countries were gathering around alliances and blocs, the solely state of Turkey was what the Turkish policy makers least wanted. The poor state of her military and her economy, in combination with her sensitive geographical location, caused the war weary European powers to integrate Turkey's status as an ally to the newly formed Western pact. On the other hand the very same characteristics drew the attention of the USSR who felt rather strong to fulfill her historical ambitions on the straits. By the late 1940's, Turkey's situation got far worse as the policies of the USSR grew hostile². Under these circumstances Turkey was ready to accept any friendly hand.

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¹ Cemal Acar, *Soğuk Savaş Dönemi Süper Güçlerin Hakimiyet Kavgası*, Ankara, AS-TEK Yay. 1991, p. 132-150.

² Rıfıkı Salim Burçak, "Türk-Sovyet İlişkilerine Genel Bakış", *Tarihi Gelişmeler İçinde Türkiye'nin Sorunları Sempozyumu*, 8-9 March 1990, Ankara, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Atatürk İlkeleri ve İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992, p. 211.

During the first decade of the post-war period, Russian expansionism towards East Europe caused great concern both within Europe and in Turkey. The war weary states of Europe did not have the capacity to stand alone against a supposed Russian drive towards the West; but they had the chance to gather their strength³. Nevertheless the situation was far worse for Greece and Turkey. The socialist states of the Balkans isolated these two states from the Western bloc.

The first crisis between Turkey and the USSR broke in mid-1945 as Soviet Foreign Minister unofficially demanded from the Turkish officials that the status of the straits should be changed in favor of the USSR and also three provinces of Turkey should be handed over to the Soviet control. These demands were officialised, one year later, by the two Soviet notes sent to Turkey.

As the Greek civil war, which had started in 1944, became intensified by late 1940's, the Western states perceived it as a sign of the changing nature of the post war Soviet foreign policy⁴. It was supposed that a revolution, communist in nature and backed up by USSR was the way of the Soviet emperialism⁵. Shaken with the Soviet notes in 1946 and the civil war in Greece, Turkish government put in to practice radical measures against procommunist intelligentsia inside the country. On the other hand Turkey appreciated the Truman Doctrine and accepted the US aid programs proposed in the Marshall plan.

The New Perspective of the Turkish foreign Policy: the 1950's

The declaration of Truman aid and the Marshall plan brought a new perspective for Turkey. The next step was the Turkey's acceptance in to NATO. In 1952 Turkey's attempts were succesfull. Finally, Turkey's solely state was overcome and her fear of struggling with the USSR alone was subdued. However Turkey's role in NATO policies was somehow controversial. Untill late 1950s, Turkey committed her foreign policy to the US interests and policies against the USSR. As a consequence, the relationship between Moscow and Ankara was subsumed within the global Soviet-American confrontation.

Although the 1950s were the untroubled times of the Turkish-American relations and on the contrary miserable times of the Turkish-Soviet relations, by

³ Haluk Gerger, *Soğuk Savaştan Yumuşamaya*, Ankara, Işık Yayıncılık, 1980, p. 35-36.

⁴ J.A.S. Grenville, *A History of the World in the Twentieth Century*, Great Britain, The Belknap Press, 1994, p. 352.

⁵ Suat Bilge, *Türkiye Sovyetler Birliği İlişkileri, 1920-1964, Güç Komşuluk*, Ankara, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları Kültür Yayınları, 1992, p. 25-59. Kamuran Gürün, *Türk Sovyet ilişkileri (1920-1953)*, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991, p. 17-22.

the early 1960s a growing tension in the Turkish-American relations became apparent. The Cuban crisis appeared to be an important case. The dismantling of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey without her consent, caused a great disappointment within Turkish government and gradually affected the Turkish public opinion negatively⁶.

When Soviets intercepted and shot down an advanced US spy plane over their air space in May 1960, another crisis emerged. Eventhough first rejected, the US officials later accepted that the spy craft was departed from Turkey. The U-2 case influenced the Turkish-Soviet relations in a terrible manner. Soviet officials claimed Turkey's position, as "hostile" and "the Soviet reaction to this hostility could be very hard". However, The Turkish military and political authorities declared that they did'nt have any information about such espionage flights. As the crisis calmed Turkish government demanded from the US officials that these flights would be due to Turkish government's permission⁷. When in 1965, another spy plane was shot down by the Soviets over the Black Sea; this caused a negative effect upon the Turkish-American relations as again no permission was asked from Turkish officials.

The period of the 1950's represents the US dependent Turkish policy. This has reflected quite negatively over Turkey's vision of the Socialist Bloc. Allying her interests with the US and NATO's interests to an extreme degree, Turkey has lost her control over her own national interests. By the end of the 1950s Turkey faced serious threats from the Soviet Union, even the danger of nuclear strike, just because she was an important component of US's containment policy over the Soviet Union. The U-2 crisis in 1960 and the Jupiter missiles crisis in 1962 marked the incapacity of Turkey to determine her own interests.

The Decline of Turkish-American Relations: the 1960s

In 1964 a final shock forced Turkey to scrutinize her relations with the US. In August 1964, the President Johnson interfered Turkey, forcing the Turkish government to halt her attempt to send her military forces to Cyprus in order to stop the attacks on the Turkish population living on the island. President Johnson sent a letter that had contained an allusive threat to Turkey that neither

⁶ Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni, Dün-Bugün-Yarın, Birinci Kitap*, İstanbul, Tekin yayınları, 1984, p. 579-585.

⁷ Sezai Orkunt, *Türkiye-ABD Askeri İlişkileri*, İstanbul, Milliyet Yayınları, 1978, p. 360.

NATO, nor US would be responsible of her security, if her action against Cyprus caused a Soviet intervention to the case. The "Johnson Letter" deeply wounded the Turkish government and the public opinion furried against the US when the letter appeared in the Turkish press. This letter represents a turning point in the Turkish-American relations and in the Turkish attitude towards the Socialist bloc.

By mid 1960s Turkey begun to question the US policies and separate them from NATO policies⁸. This was an attempt to control the practises of the US policies affecting the Turkey's security. Instead of full commitment as done in the 1950s, Turkey tried to lean on NATO rather than US on her security. In July 1969 Turkey negotiated with the US in order to organize the bunch of military treaties that were signed after 1954 and restore the status of the NATO bases, which were evidently used in favour of the US interests. However the foundations of the US-Turkish military cooperation were kept present in the treaty⁹. Also Turkey gradually started to seek alternative policies to fulfill her national interests. Establishing economic relations with the European Economic Community and the Soviet Union were such examples to these new policies¹⁰.

The Detoriation of Turkish American Relations: the 1970s

Infact, by late 1960s, the rise of the anti-US view in the Turkish public opinion was becoming evident. The Turkish left intelligentsia who had been under oppression during the 1950s had developed. This was also because of the rise of the left in global sense with the 1968 movements around the world. Eventhough the rise of the left did not affect the government policies; the leftist point of view was more effective in the Turkish public opinion. By 1970s the anti-US protests in the Turkish Universities and demonstrations of the pressure groups led by the labour unions were on the rise. Eventhough these were suprassed in 1973 by a pro-US coup d'etat, the Turkish commitment to the US ideals as in the 1950s were no more present.

On the other side of the scale, the important status of Turkey in the US foreign policy was diminishing. As the new military technologies (such as the nuc-

⁸ Haluk Gerger, *O Yıllar*, Ankara, Dost Kitabevi yayınları, 1987, p. 153-159.

⁹ Çağrı Erhan, "1945-1960 ABD ve NATO ile İlişkiler", Baskın Oran (Eds), *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 697.

¹⁰ Fahir Armaoğlu, "Türkiye ve Batı Dünyasına Genel Bir Bakış (Dün-Bugün-Yarın), *Tarihi Gelişmeler İçinde Türkiye'nin Sorunları Sempozyumu*, p. 219.

lear strike capable sea vessels) progressed, the importance of Turkey's strategic geographical position lessened. Also US was anxious to maintain regional stabilities. As Turkey's military was evidently growing stronger, US government was trying to balance this growth by investing in Turkey's main regional rival, Greece¹¹. Also in 1970s the tradition of the US domestic policy effected the Turkish-American relations. The Armenian and Greek lobbies, that were influential in the US Congress, clearly influenced the US policies concerning Turkey; especially in the Cyprus case in which Turkey was clearly sensitive¹². After Turkey's successful intervention against the coup d'état in Cyprus in 1974, the US Congress, which was influenced by the Greek lobby, proposed an arms embargo upon Turkey in February 1975¹³.

Infact, the US arms embargo in 1975 swept away what was left from the foundations of the Turkish-American cooperation: the military support. As the arms embargo was officially announced, Turkey countered with the announcement of the abrogation of the Turkish American Defence and Cooperation Treaty that was signed in July 1969 and that all the US bases and military facilities in Turkish territory was placed under Turkish control. The determined attitude of Turkey in mid 1970s was effective. In 1976 the arms embargo was loosened and a new Defence and Cooperation treaty was signed in 1976 in Washington, however this treaty was not approved in the Turkish National Assembly. In spite of Turkey's determination, the arms embargo was lifted in September 1978.

Relations with the USSR as Turkish foreign Policy's New Approach: the Late 1970s

Eventhough the Turkish-American relations was fluctuating, there was a steady rise in the Turco-Soviet relations in the 1970s. There were initial steps of economic and technical cooperation, however these were only industrial investments. Until 1976 the cooperation was unofficial but in 1976 an intergovernmental commission was founded to conduct the economical relations. In 1978, Turkey was the most important state among the underdeveloped or developing countries in the Soviet Union's foreign aid agenda. Infact starting from the late

¹¹ Oral Sander, *Türkiye'nin Dış Politikası*, İstanbul, İmge Kitabevi, 1998, p. 121-122.

¹² Stanford-Ezel Kural Shaw, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Modern Türkiye*, V. II, İstanbul, E Yayınları, 1994, p. 508.

¹³ Mehmet Ali Birand, *Dişet, Türkiye ve Kıbrıs Üzerine uluslararası Pazarlıklar, 1974-1980*, İstanbul, Milliyet Yayınları, 1985, p. 79.

1960s, Turkey was one of the rare states that obtained foreign aid from both of the super powers¹⁴.

It was obvious that the deterioration in the Turkish-American relations by the early 1970s forced Turkey to search for new international partners. It could be said that the 1970s were the controversy of the 1950s.

Back in the US Route: the Early 1980s

The September Coup D'etat in 1980 simply returned Turkey to her previous pro-US route. This was mainly because of the new military regime's need for international support. As US was the only major state that had offered recognition to the new military government, the early 1980s Turkish foreign policy had showed close resemblance to the 1950s, uniting her strategies with the US. The Rogers Plan was an important example¹⁵. Eventhough Turkey had the right to veto; she had approved the return of her regional rival, Greece, to NATO's military wing that she had withdrawn earlier. This acceptance was due to US pressure upon the military government.

By the mid 1980s, as the civil rule was established again in Turkey, Turkish foreign policy had begun shape in another manner from the previous years. US was still the major component of the Turkish foreign policy, however, Prime Minister Turgut Özal was inquisitive of Turkey's position to act as a regional actor¹⁶. These ambitions were reflected in the policies towards her neighbours in the late 1980s. In 1987, after a massive press campaign, Bulgaria was forced to reform the status of her Turkish population¹⁷.

Turkey as a Regional Actor: the 1990s

As Turkish foreign policy was in an incline, the geography of Europe was about to change. The Socialist Bloc had been in depression, due to economical problems from the beginning of the 1980s. Finally in 1989, by the unification of the two Germanies, the socialist bloc collapsed . By 1993 all the socialist countries of Europe had changed their governments and the Soviet Union had shrin-

¹⁴ Baskın Oran (Eds), *Türk Dış Politikası*, V.1:1919-1980 İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2001, p. 783.

¹⁵ Ufuk Güldemir, *Kanat Operasyonu*, İstanbul, Tekin Yayınevi, 1985, p. 81-91.

¹⁶ Armoğlu, *20. Yüzyıl Siyasi Tarihi*, (V.II:1980-1990), Ankara, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür yayımları, 1992, p. 253.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 309-320.

ked to the Federation of Free States and than to the Russian Federation. However all the Baltic and Caucasus states and Ukraine choosed to establish their own sovereign states.

For Turkey, the collapse of the Socialist Bloc was a surprise because of its sudden nature. However the collapse had brought Turkey both negative effects and positive opportunities. The main negative effect was the loss of Turkey's geopolitic importance as a military ally for the West. But this disadvantage was quickly overcome. As the new Turkic states of the Caucasus were seeking foreign help for improving their insufficient economies, Turkey's geographical location and historical roots appeared as a bridge linking West with these new born states. In Turkish government circles and in public opinion, it was assumed that Turkey could be the model for these new states' transition to market economies because of her ethnic ties with the region. However Turkey's helping position was illusionary. Turkey's financial resources were weak and because of that her only role never exceeded from the secondary role of acting as a bridge between the West and the Caucasus. Despite that, Turkish private sector's investments in the post-Socialist countries had risen rapidly. The old Socialists like Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia and even Russia welcomed Turkish investors. The rapid growth of the economical relations reflected the nature of the political relations positively. On June 1992, Black Sea Economic Coopereation was established in the hope of creating an environment for better economical relations.

In controversy of what was expected, the collapse of the Socialist Bloc in fact sustained Turkey's geopolitical position. By mid 1990s as the regional religious and ethnical rivalries were on the rise, Turkey was the only country in her region that has contemprrary secular state with a western type democracy. The rising importance of Turkey brought Turkish-American relations to a new sense of interdependency. Also this new interdependency gave Turkish foreign policy new opportunities to act as a regional power. Under these circumstances Turkey choose to improve the cooperation with her post-Socialist neighbours, firmly, Russia in the first place.

The relationtionship between Ankara and Moscow has now assumed a distinct autonomy and, moreover, is rightly regarded as the centrepiece of an emerging regional system focused on the Black Sea and the Caspian.

CONCLUSION: Turkey, US and Russia, New Opportunities towards a New Future

As a conclusion, Russia has always occupied a special and continuous place in Turkish foreign policy. However the other aspect of Turkey's foreign policy is her Western orientation and the problem of maintaining a balance between her northeastern neighbour and the NATO. So Turkey's search to find ways of achieving a sustainable equilibrium, by taking the developments in both Russia's and the NATO's policies into account is inevitable. Thanks to the alterations in the international environment, with the downfall of the USSR and the collapse of communist regime, the approaches of the US and Western states towards Russia changed. Therefore, the value they place on Turkey's efforts to achieve a balance has changed too.

After September 11, "there was something new under the sun" and the whole world faced with a new security problem: international terrorism". Suffering from the same fatal enemy, Russia, Turkey and USA agreed on the same basis and the threat of terrorism, ironically, created a pact of peace between former enemies. This time the target enemy is indefinite but the is obvious and ideological rivalries, conflict of interests, different understanding of norms are at secondary position. Providing a pacific environment is important and thus inevitable for both Russia and Turkey, since the two countries are still in a period of perestroika in economic, social and political terms.

The other aspect of this cordial approachment is related to transportation of energy supplies that is still under a disguised Russian control. Cooperation between the two states will benefit both sides and the realisation of Bluestream Project and the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline will accelerate the warming of the relationship between the two states. Moreover in light of Turkey's recent tendency towards more independent policies in regional affairs and a subsequent lessening of sensitivity to US security interests, Russia's perception of neighbourhood might change and the upgrading of bilateral relations will come to effect. Increased Turkish-Russian interdependence may be a mixed blessing for the US. The warming of Turkish-Russian relations, albeit motivated by purely Realpolitik concerns and devoid of any social or cultural basis, may acquire a purely 'Eurasian' character at the expense of US strategic interests in the region. But also such a development is likely to decrease the potential for direct confrontation between the two rivals in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Considering the fact that after Russia's accession to NATO Council, the enemy and the ally profiles have changed for both parties, there is much room for cooperation at the intraregional and transcontinental levels. Freed from the negative US influence as was present during the cold war, there seems a bright future for Turco-Russian relations.

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ÖZET

İkinci Dünya Savaşının sona ermesinin ardından Türkiye diplomatik bir yalnızlık içindeydi. Türkiye bu durumuna ek olarak, coğrafi konumu nedeni ile de, iki karşıt blokun ortasında bulunmaktaydı. 1945 yılında Sovyetler Birliği ile Türkiye arasında bozulan ilişkiler nedeniyle Türkiye içinde bulunduğu zor durumu Batı ittifakı ile birleşerek gidermek istemekteydi. Türkiye'nin ihtiyacı olduğu destek ise ABD'den geldi.

Soğuk Savaşın başlamasından 1990'lara değin geçen süre içerisinde Türk Dış Politikasının davranış karakteristiği genel olarak ABD ve SSCB'nin tavrına göre eğilimler gösterdi.

Bu makalenin temel amacı 1940'ların sonundan günümüze ABD ile Türkiye arasındaki ilişkileri inceleyerek, bu ilişkileri sorgulamak ve bu ilişkilerin Türkiye'nin Sovyetler Birliği ekseninde Sosyalist Bloka yönelik politikalarını değerlendirmektir.

SUMMARY

After the Second World War Turkey found herself in a diplomatic solitude. Also because of her geographical location, Turkey was placed between two antagonist blocs. In 1945 as the Turco-Soviet relations began to deteriorate, Turkey was willing to integrate herself with the Western Bloc and to overcome her security problems with the Western help. However this help came from the US.

From the beginning of the Cold War until 1990's, the characteristics of the Turkish foreign policy was shaped upon the US' and the USSR's attitudes towards Turkey.

The main theme of this article is to interrogate the Turkish-American relations from 1940's until today and to examine the Turkey's policies towards the Socialist Bloc.