



Strategic Shifts: The Diplomatic Path Leading Turkey into the Korean War*

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This article examines the continuity in Turkish foreign policy between World War II and the Korean War, arguing that Turkey's neutrality during World War II significantly impacted its decision to intervene in Korea. Using newly declassified Turkish archives alongside American, British, and German sources, the author contends that Turkey's failure to fulfill its commitments to join the Allies in World War II resulted in a substantial loss of credibility among Western powers. This loss of trust became a major obstacle for Turkey in the post-war period, hindering its attempts to join NATO and forge closer ties with the West in the face of Soviet hostility. The article challenges existing literature that often treats Turkey's World War II and Korean War policies as separate events. Instead, it argues that the Korean War presented a crucial opportunity for Turkey to rehabilitate its image and demonstrate its reliability as an ally to the Western bloc. By sending troops to Korea, Turkey aimed to dispel the untrustworthy image stemming from its World War II neutrality and prove its commitment to the international community. The author emphasizes that Turkey's decision to intervene in the Korean War was directly influenced by its desire to address the credibility loss from its earlier neutrality policy. This research highlights the long-term consequences of major foreign policy decisions and provides a new perspective on Turkey's motivations for participating in the Korean War, linking it directly to the aftermath of its World War II stance.

주제어 Turkey (Türkiye), World War II, Korean War, Diplomatic History, Political History, NATO.

I. Introduction

On June 25, 1950, North Korea initiated a sudden attack on South Korea, crossing the 38th parallel with seven divisions. The United States swiftly responded, mobilizing troops and urging the United Nations to act. The UN passed Resolution 82, calling for North Korea's withdrawal, followed by Resolution 83, which requested member states to support South Korea when North Korea failed to comply. Turkey's newly elected Democrat Party carefully considered its response, weighing the risk of angering neighboring Soviet Union against the opportunity to demonstrate its foreign policy alignment with the West. Ultimately, Turkey committed to sending a brigade of 6,092 men to Korea, joining fifteen other nations in providing ground troops. Over the next two decades, Turkey's involvement expanded, with a total of 60,266 personnel deployed, including soldiers, medical staff, teachers, and religious leaders, until the majority of UN forces withdrew in 1971.¹

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¹ "Kore Harbi'ne Türk Kuvvetlerinin Katılmasının Hatırasına Kore'de Dikilecek Abide İçin Hazırlanan Anket... [Survey Prepared for the Monument to Be Erected in Korea in Memory of the Participation of Turkish Forces in the Korean War..]," August 17, 1973, 110-9-1-15 / KORE HARBİ (1950-1953), Ministry of National Defense ATASE Archive.

The period between World War II and the Korean War received a lot of attention from scholars who focused on Turkish diplomatic history. The literature often emphasizes the importance of Turkey's security concerns and their impact on foreign policy decisions.² In addition, Turkey's foreign policy decisions during World War II and the Korean War are generally considered separately, without any direct relation to one another.³ This article intervenes precisely in this regard and stresses the aspect of continuity in Turkish foreign policy. It suggests that an unintended consequence of Turkey's neutrality-based foreign policy during World War II was the loss of credibility. The literature often bypasses the loss of credibility prevalent in archival documents during and after World War II and jumps straight to Turkey's decision to intervene in the Korean War, legitimizing it by highlighting Turkey's security concerns at the time. While this article agrees that Turkey's security concerns played a significant role in the decision-making process, it argues that an equally important concern for Turkish policymakers at the time was Western distrust towards Turkey, resulting from its neutrality policy during World War II. Therefore, when the Korean War started, Turkish leaders used it as an opportunity to dispel their country's untrustworthy image and demonstrate Turkey's potential as a reliable ally, especially to the U.S.

Until very recently, scholars researching Turkish diplomatic history were primarily reliant on foreign archival sources, as the Turkish Diplomatic Archives had not yet completed the declassification process. In early 2022, a large number of documents related to World War II and the Korean War were finally declassified, making it possible to include official Turkish perspectives in the overall analysis. Besides Turkish archival sources, this study mainly draws

² For example see: Metin Tamkoç, "Turkey's Quest for Security through Defensive Alliances," *Milletlerarası Münasebetler Türk Yıllığı* 1, no. 2 (1961): 1–39; Melvyn P. Leffler, "Strategy, Diplomacy, and the Cold War: The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 4 (1985): 807–25; George McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey's NATO Entry Contained the Soviets* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990); Ekavi Athanassopoulou, "Western Defence Developments and Turkey's Search for Security in 1948," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 77–108; Behçet K. Yeşilbursa, "Turkey's Participation in the Middle East Command and Its Admission to NATO, 1950–52," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (1999): 70–102; Şuhnaz Yılmaz, "Turkey's Quest for NATO Membership: The Institutionalization of the Turkish–American Alliance," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 12, no. 4 (2012): 481–95.

³ For Turkish foreign policy during World War II see: Frank G. Weber, *The Evasive Neutral: Germany, Britain, and the Quest for a Turkish Alliance in the Second World War* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1979); Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece*, vol. 732 (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Brock Millman, "Turkish Foreign and Strategic Policy 1934–42," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 3 (1995): 483–508; John M. Vanderlippe, "A Cautious Balance: The Question of Turkey in World War II," *The Historian* 64, no. 1 (2001): 63–80; Selim Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An 'active' Neutrality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John M. Vander Lippe, "Forgotten Brigade of the Forgotten War: Turkey's Participation in the Korean War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (2000): 92–102; Fusun Turkmen, "Turkey and the Korean War," *Turkish Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 161–80; Cameron S. Brown, "The One Coalition They Craved to Join: Turkey in the Korean War," *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 89–108.

on American, British, and German sources. The article is divided into three parts. The first part provides a brief diplomatic history of Turkey's neutrality-based foreign policy during World War II and its implications on Allied perception. The second part details the total collapse of Allied confidence and Turkey's attempts at rapprochement with the U.S. The last part focuses on how Turkish policymakers decided to intervene in the Korean War.

II. Foot Dragging and Losing Confidence: Implications of Neutrality

“Was it possible to avoid the war altogether? Or could we have delayed our entry? It is worth reflecting on these questions.”⁴ This was the answer Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey, gave when asked about the Ottoman Empire's entry into World War I. Regarding this issue, Atatürk told İsmet İnönü, the Prime Minister at the time who would later become Atatürk's successor, that the Committee of Union and Progress leaders lacked experience and ability, but the founders of the Republic were different from them since they had the experience of a world war.⁵ There is little doubt that when World War II erupted on September 1, 1939, the newly elected President İnönü and the ruling elite of Turkey were reminded of the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I. Taking into account his bitter experience, İnönü decided to do what the Ottoman Empire could not in World War I: avoid it at all costs.

Neutrality-based foreign policy seemed to be the only viable solution to avoid the war. However, the execution of such foreign policy proved difficult since both Axis powers and Allies expected Turkey to join the war on their side to exploit the other's weaknesses. The first side to exert pressure on Turkey was its allies.⁶ On October 19, 1939, Turkey signed a fully-fledged alliance treaty with Britain and France, commonly referred to as the “Tripartite Alliance.” The signing of this treaty was significant as it marked Turkey's inclusion into the Western security apparatus for the first time in history.⁷ Following Italy's declaration of war and its air raid on Malta, Britain and France demanded that Turkey enter the war.⁸ According to the second article of the Tripartite Alliance, Turkey was expected to join the war on the side

⁴ Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1998), 205.

⁵ Sabahattin Selek, *İsmet İnönü: Hatıralar 1* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), 141.

⁶ Yücel Güçlü, “Turco-British Relations on the Eve of the Second World War,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 4 (2003): 200.

⁷ For more information regarding the context and importance of the Tripartite Alliance see: William Hale, “Turkey and Britain in World War II: Origins and Results of the Tripartite Alliance, 1935-40,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 23, no. 6 (2021): 824–44.

⁸ Brock Millman, *Ill-Made Alliance: Anglo-Turkish Relations, 1934-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1998), 370.

of its allies.⁹ However, the Turkish government announced that it would preserve its “present attitude of non-belligerency for the security and defense” of Turkey.¹⁰ This statement was seen as a clear defection by Britain, especially after it requested a revised announcement that mentions a collective decision taken in consultation with the British regarding Turkish inactivity.¹¹

After Turkey decided not to follow the Tripartite Alliance of 1939 line by line, Germany started its pressure campaign. Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, sent a telegram in May 1941 to his Ambassador in Ankara, Franz von Papen, and instructed him to make certain steps regarding a treaty between Turkey and Germany that would “unloose the country [Turkey] from its present tie with Britain and more or less lead it into our camp.”¹² Ribbentrop also told the Turkish Ambassador in Berlin that “the Führer would welcome it if he could have all Germany’s old allies at our side at this time.”¹³ The result of this attempt was the conclusion of the German-Turkish Treaty of Friendship signed by Franz von Papen and Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Şükrü Saracoğlu on June 18, 1941. While Turkey guaranteed not to attack German territories, it also did not promise any assistance to Germany during the war.¹⁴ Especially after the German defeat in Stalingrad, the Turkish government became much more cautious about a possible pro-Axis rapprochement. Throughout the war, Germany’s expectation of a pro-Axis Turkey proved vain.

Allies started to reevaluate Turkey’s entrance to the war in late 1942. The U.S. already agreed to extend weaponry, supplies, and technical assistance in July 1942 under the Lend-Lease Act of 1941.¹⁵ On the other hand, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill began floating the idea that the Turkish Army would be useful in defending the Balkans against

⁹ Foreign Office, “371/424/283,T6131/436/384 Halifax Curricular,” May 2, 1939; “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37148 - 149266 - 25,” January 10, 1939.

¹⁰ Millman, *Ill-Made Alliance*, 372.

¹¹ Millman, 371.

¹² *German Foreign Office Documents German Policy in Turkey (1941-1943)* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1948), 9. There seems to be a difference of opinion between Ribbentrop and Papen. While Ribbentrop wished Turkey to become an active ally of the Axis alliance, Papen thought that a neutral Turkey would serve the German interests better. For Papen’s thoughts during this period see: Franz von Papen, *Memoirs* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1952), 478–80.

¹³ Onur İsci, “The Massigli Affair and Its Context: Turkish Foreign Policy after the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no. 2 (2020): 25.

¹⁴ “Treaty of Friendship Between Germany and Turkey,” June 18, 1941, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/turger41.asp#art1>.

¹⁵ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation by George V. Allen of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, 29 January 1943 *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, The Near East and Africa, Volume IV* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), 1091.

Germany.¹⁶ In January 1943, at the Casablanca Conference, he discussed this issue with the President of the U.S. Franklin D. Roosevelt. According to American documents, President Roosevelt agreed on the need for Turkey's "entry to the war without delay."¹⁷ Therefore, Churchill asked Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, his Ambassador in Ankara, to prepare "a most secret rendezvous" with his counterparts in Turkey.¹⁸ On January 30, 1943, Churchill arrived in Turkey and took part in the Adana Conference with Turkish President İsmet İnönü. In the conference, Churchill asked for Turkey's entrance to the war as early as the summer and promised air support as well as skilled personnel in return. He suggested that Turkey "should be closely associated with the two great Western democracies not only during the concluding stages of the war but in the general work of world rehabilitation which [would] follow."¹⁹ This, in essence, was an offer to Turkey. If Turkey wanted to be in a position of strength after the world war, it would have to commit to a more active foreign policy regarding German presence in the Balkans. İnönü, on the other hand, conveyed that Turkey was concerned about the Soviet's place in Europe after Germany's defeat and asked for more military equipment.²⁰ Churchill and the British Ambassador Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen declared that the conference resulted in "distinct success."²¹ Alexander Cadogan, Under-Secretary of British Foreign Office, transmitted the nature of the meeting to Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, as: "PM tried to hint to them that...they must not hesitate too long to join the ranks of the victorious powers. PM does not doubt that they saw the point of this."²² Rauf Orbay, Turkey's Ambassador to the U.K., reported that his contacts from the British Foreign Office conveyed to him that "Churchill left -Adana- with very positive impressions."²³ However, the Turkish Diplomatic Archives revealed that after the conference, senior Turkish leaders believed that Churchill maintained his support for Turkey's policy of neutrality while also providing it with the necessary equipment.²⁴

¹⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate, 1950*, vol. 4 (London: Rosetta Books, 2014), 624–26.

¹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, The Conferences at Washington, 1941–1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1958), 772.

¹⁸ Knatchbull-Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in Peace and War* (London: John Murray, 1949), 177–78.

¹⁹ Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate, 1950*, 4:860.

²⁰ Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İkinci Adam* (Ankara: Remzi Kitabevi, 1993), 259.

²¹ The Ambassador in Turkey (Steinhardt) to the Secretary of State *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, The Near East and Africa, Volume IV*, 1061.

²² Foreign Office, "800/403, Cadogan to Eden," February 2, 1943.

²³ "Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 88100 - 320606 - 79," November 1, 1943.

²⁴ "Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37398 - 150257 - 105," February 7, 1943.



Figure 1. Churchill and İnönü in Adana.²⁵

The difference of opinions regarding the Adana Conference surfaced when a team of British negotiators under the leadership of General Henry Maitland Wilson arrived in Turkey to start executing “Operation Hardihood” which aimed to prepare Turkey for a war against Germany. General Wilson’s mission was received with a great deal of skepticism, and their Turkish counterparts were not at all cooperative regarding the execution of such a plan.²⁶ When the Tehran Conference convened on November 28, 1943, Churchill was still of the opinion that Turkey should enter the conflict as soon as possible and the Allies should provide Turkey a shield from air raids.²⁷ In Tehran, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed to invite İnönü to Cairo after the Tehran Conference to discuss Turkey’s entrance to the war. Two planes sent by both Churchill and Roosevelt flew to Turkey to take the Turkish President to Cairo. İnönü chose the American plane for his travel. At the Cairo Conference, Churchill and Roosevelt essentially laid siege to İnönü for Turkey’s entrance to the war on the 15th of February at the latest. Churchill argued that this was the moment for Turkey, and if it did not act, it would “find herself alone, not on the Bench, but wandering about in Court” after the conclusion of the war.²⁸ Roosevelt also told İnönü that Turkey would find itself alone after the war if it did not align

²⁵ “Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President of Turkey,,” 1946, 2017696450, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

²⁶ Vanderlippe, “A Cautious Balance,” 70.

²⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 5, Closing the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), 355.

²⁸ United States—United Kingdom Agreed Minutes *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 691.

itself with the Allies by the 15th of February. İnönü replied that Turkey needed more time and equipment to prepare for the war but “remained faithful to the principles which she had embraced from the first moment.”²⁹ Just before İnönü left Cairo on December 7, 1943, Churchill had a one-on-one meeting with him and disclosed that on the 15th of February, Allies would ask permission to fly in, and if the answer were negative, then all Allied resources would be directed elsewhere. Churchill again warned İnönü about the consequences of non-belligerency: “In that event, the war would move westwards and Turkey would lose the chance of coming in and of reaping the advantages which entry into the war would promise her.” Churchill added:

The Alliance would cease to have any value for war purposes. The moment would have gone when Turkey could render the great service we asked for. Turkey would stay where she was. Friendship would remain, but as an effective ally in the war, Turkey would count for nothing. We should win, but without Turkey. Turkey’s entry into the war was important for us as it gave a chance of including Turkey with the Allies in the future.³⁰

After the Cairo Conference, it was apparent that Turkey would no longer be able to keep foot-dragging regarding its entrance to the war on the Allies’ side. However, the Turkish side still believed that it could preserve its neutral status despite the crystal-clear warnings from Churchill and Roosevelt. Rauf Orbay, Turkey’s Ambassador to the U.K., reported about some Western media coverage which essentially suggested that the “Cairo Conference marked a new phase in Turkey's neutrality policy, with Turkey's entrance into the war being deemed a non-issue.”³¹ The prevalence of such wishful thinking within the Turkish diplomatic sphere at that time ultimately resulted in enduring consequences for Turkish diplomacy.

²⁹ United States—United Kingdom Agreed Minutes *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*, 693.

³⁰ United Kingdom Minutes *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran, 1943*, 756–57.

³¹ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 88100 - 320606 - 115,” December 9, 1943.



Figure 2. Roosevelt, İnönü and Churchill in the Second Cairo Conference³²

III. Total Collapse of Allied Confidence and Rapprochement to the U.S.

Britain sent a military mission to Turkey in early 1944 to prepare its airfields for the use of Allied aircraft. The operation was codenamed “Saturn.” Immediately after the beginning of mutual discussions, Turkish foot-dragging tactics became apparent to the British side. In a telegram to Anthony Eden, Churchill laid out what would happen if Turks did not abide by the February 15 deadline: “It will be the end of the alliance between Britain and Turkey... we should completely disinterest ourselves in the future of Turkey. If...Russia demands Constantinople and Straits; Great Britain would in no wise resist her.”³³ When the British diplomats knew for sure that Turkey would not enter the war, the military mission was withdrawn, and Turkey was diplomatically punished. British Foreign Secretary Eden wrote: “Turks are not to be trusted and Numan least of all. I should like to see the latter scragged!”³⁴ George Clutton, a British diplomat, accused Turkey of betraying its allies and expressed his doubts about Turkey’s survival after the war.³⁵ It is evident from the British Foreign Office’s telegrams during this period that they were in favor of the Soviets teaching Turks a lesson

³² “The President of Turkey Confers with President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill at Cairo,” 1943, 2004667692, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

³³ Nicholas Tamkin, *Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union, 1940–45: Strategy, Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Hampshire: Springer, 2009), 139.

³⁴ Tamkin, 141.

³⁵ Tamkin, 140.

for their non-belligerence.

British Ambassador to Turkey, Hugessen, noted after the departure of the British Military mission, “a period of some difficulty followed, during which we did not attempt to conceal our disappointment.”³⁶ Britain suspended all shipments of war material, and the U.S. stopped all lend-lease-related supplies to Turkey.³⁷ Turkish diplomatic archives reflect the chaos that engulfed after the mission’s departure. Turkish Ambassador to the U.K., Rauf Orbay, abruptly resigned from his post, which was interpreted as a reflection of the differences of opinion between him and Ankara regarding Turkey’s intervention in the war.³⁸ British Ambassador to Turkey, Hugessen, left his post unattended for about a month.³⁹ The Turkish Embassy in the U.K. reported to Ankara that more or less everybody in the British political spectrum was expressing their resentment towards Turkey.⁴⁰ The Turkish Ambassador to the U.S., Münir Ertegün, sent a detailed report to Ankara and argued that due to the recent events, the British side could sacrifice Turkey at any point for Russia’s interests.⁴¹ On the other hand, British media started to harshly criticize Turkey and question its value as an ally.⁴² While these debates were continuing, Churchill openly criticized Spain and Turkey for their positioning during the war. He argued that Turkey was following a sneaky foreign policy based on deception and that it would have to face the consequences during and after the war.⁴³ Ruşen Eşref Ünaydın, who replaced Rauf Orbay as Turkey’s Ambassador to the U.K., reported that during his two-month tenure, British officials purposely did not meet with him, therefore he could not provide any substantial information to Ankara.⁴⁴ Eventually, the Turkish side realized that their wish for a status quo ante was in vain. Numan Menemencioğlu, the Turkish Foreign Minister, wrote in his diary: “Little by little, the British began to abstain from all cordiality, and they no longer even appeared to see us, in order not to have to greet us.”⁴⁵ President Roosevelt also instructed his Ambassador to Turkey, Laurence Steinhardt, to “cool off relations with the

³⁶ Knatchbull-Hugessen, *Diplomat in Peace and War*, 200.

³⁷ The Ambassador in Turkey (Steinhardt) to the Secretary of State *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East, Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), 817.

³⁸ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37398 - 150257 - 2,” March 20, 1944.

³⁹ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37320 - 149930 - 23,” February 26, 1944.

⁴⁰ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37165 - 148354 - 205,” February 15, 1944.

⁴¹ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37165 - 148354 - 218,” March 9, 1944.

⁴² “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37398 - 150257 - 23,” April 16, 1944.

⁴³ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37055 - 148722 - 14,” May 27, 1944.

⁴⁴ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37398 - 150257 - 69,” July 1, 1944.

⁴⁵ Edward Weisband, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1943-1945: Small State Diplomacy and Great Power Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 224.

Turks.”⁴⁶ On April 14, 1944, American and British Ambassadors threatened a blockade on Turkey if it did not cease its trade of vital items to Axis powers.⁴⁷ Turkey halted all chromium export to Germany on April 20, and about two months later, Numan Menemencioğlu resigned from his post since he was seen as a pro-Axis figure by the Allies.⁴⁸ Even though Turkey ceased diplomatic relations with Germany on August 2, 1944, and declared war against the Axis on February 23, 1945, Turkey’s moment in the war had long passed. Now, as Churchill and Roosevelt warned in Cairo, Turkey was on its own. Turkish diplomatic archives time and again show that the Allies clearly warned Turkey of the price of being neutral during World War II, but Turkish policymakers did everything they could to stay neutral.⁴⁹ In the aftermath of World War II, Turkey found itself in a position where it had to prove its worth as a reliable partner to the Allies due to its policy of neutrality.

Even before the conclusion of World War II, Stalin began to propose a change in the Montreux Convention regarding Turkey’s rights in the straits at the Yalta Conference.⁵⁰ After the Yalta Conference, the Soviet Union adopted a hostile attitude towards its relations with Turkey. Starting from March 1945, Soviet media launched an anti-Turkish propaganda campaign, claiming that two cities on Turkey’s northeastern border with the Soviet Union, namely Kars and Ardahan, originally belonged to Armenians. Some Soviet academicians followed suit soon after with similar claims about Kars and Ardahan.⁵¹ On March 19, 1945, Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Union's Foreign Minister, informed Selim Sarper, the Turkish Ambassador to the Soviet Union, that the Soviet Union had no intention of renewing the 1925 Treaty of Friendship. In another meeting with Sarper, Molotov disclosed the Soviet demands on Turkey: revisions to Turkey’s eastern frontier and changes to the clauses of the Montreux Convention regarding Turkey’s rights in the straits.⁵² Stalin did not change his position concerning these two demands until he died in 1952. In an oral history interview, Turkey’s President İsmet İnönü suggested that his aim in the aftermath of World War II was to keep Turkey as a neutral state, avoiding leaning towards either the U.K. or the Soviet Union.

⁴⁶ The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in Turkey (Steinhardt) *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East, Volume V*, 818.

⁴⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, The Far East, Volume V*, 843.

⁴⁸ Saban Halis Çalis, *Turkey’s Cold War: Foreign Policy and Western Alignment in the Modern Republic* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 53–54.

⁴⁹ “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 37398 - 150257 - 15,” June 13, 1944.

⁵⁰ Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War*, 178.

⁵¹ Deringil, 179.

⁵² “Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 68095 - 298075 - 51,” March 20, 1945; Onur İsci, “Turkey at a Crossroads: The Soviet Threat and Postwar Realignment, 1945–1946,” *Diplomatic History*, July 12, 2023, 1–26.

However, he pinpointed the Soviet Union's hostile foreign policy as the watershed moment that forced Turkey to align itself firmly with the Western powers.⁵³ At the same time, the U.S. and the U.K. lost their interest and confidence in Turkey due to the latter's foreign policy choices during World War II, and they maintained their distance after the conclusion of the war. Therefore, immediately after the end of World War II, Turkey started to approach the U.S.

IV. Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and Turkey's Reaction

The most shocking diplomatic event for Turkish foreign policy before the Korean War was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. Twelve states signed the Treaty in Washington on April 4, 1949. These nations also became the founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), founded to deter any Soviet aggression against its member states by invoking Article 5 of the treaty.⁵⁴ The reaction from the Turkish side to this development was one of disappointment. The Turks expected an invitation from the twelve states that initially formed NATO before signing the treaty. Politicians from the Republican People's Party (RPP) reasoned that the main reason why Turkey was not included in the new organization was its geographical location. This was what the American side informed Feridun Cemal Erkin, the Turkish Ambassador in Washington. Robert A. Lovett, the Undersecretary of State, informed Erkin that Turkey was geographically and culturally outside of the Western world. According to Lovett, this new organization was exclusively for the countries situated in the North Atlantic.⁵⁵ However, after NATO released the information that the parts of Algeria were also included in its sphere of defense, this theory was debunked.

İnönü sent his Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak to discuss NATO with the Secretary of State Dean Acheson in April 1949. The memorandum of this meeting from the American side details the frustrations of Turkey. Sadak started by stating that the Turkish government was shocked when it learned about Italy's involvement in NATO since it conceived NATO as first and foremost a security alliance between countries in the North Atlantic region.⁵⁶ Sadak asked

⁵³ "İsmet İnönü, Metin Toker'e İkinci Dünya Savaşını Anlatıyor [İsmet İnönü Talks About World War II with Metin Toker] -YouTube," accessed May 19, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPw7MXwF_ec.

⁵⁴ "The North Atlantic Treaty" (NATO, 1949), https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

⁵⁵ Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl Vaşington Büyükelçiliği II. Cilt, I. Kısım* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1986), 14.

⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1977), 1648.

Acheson whether there was any change in the Truman administration's support for Turkish independence. Acheson replied that the Truman administration still thought highly of Turkey and supported its independence. Then, Sadak asked whether Turkey could be added as a member of this organization or another organization in the name of the Eastern Mediterranean Pact. Acheson replied negatively.⁵⁷ Sadak then inquired about a mutual security pact between the U.S. and Turkey within a year. Acheson's answer was again negative, but he added that the developments in Europe might lead the U.S. to reconsider its stance.⁵⁸ After he met with Acheson, Sadak returned to Turkey empty-handed. In formal events, such as this one, American officials did not give a hint as to why Turkey was left out of NATO. However, in informal events, they spoke much more freely and candidly. An informal lunch at the Turkish Embassy in Washington provided U.S. State Department officials with an opportunity to share some insights about the U.S. approach towards Turkey with their Turkish counterparts. A senior State Department official told the Turkish Ambassador: "Neutrality during the war was very beneficial for you. I hope it continues to be equally beneficial in the future." In his telegram to Ankara, the Turkish Ambassador, Feridun Cemal Erkin, reported that this "half serious, half sarcastic sentence" had significant meaning to it.⁵⁹ Erkin did not detail his interpretation in the telegram; however, this document and numerous others from Turkish diplomatic archives leave no doubt that the legacy of Turkish neutrality was still on the minds of American policymakers, and it was affecting their decisions.

After Turkish Foreign Minister Necmettin Sadak's return to Turkey, Truman sent a private letter to İnönü on April 26, 1949, and suggested that "the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in no wise diminishes the concern felt in the United States for the maintenance of the independence and integrity of Turkey."⁶⁰ The U.S. was trying to give the impression that it did not leave Turkey out, but at the same time, it did not promise anything concerning a defense pact. On October 13, 1949, Feridun Cemal Erkin, the Turkish Ambassador to the U.S., took John D. Jernegan, the Director of the Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs, aside at a lunch in the Turkish Embassy and inquired whether the U.S. took any steps concerning an alliance between Britain, France, and Turkey. Jernagen stated that the U.S. did not. Erkin informed him that his colleagues at the Turkish Embassies in Britain and France were ready to discuss this issue should the U.S. feel the need to do so. Jernagen thanked Erkin for reminding

⁵⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI*, 1650.

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI*, 1652.

⁵⁹ "Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 23597 - 102732 - 33," March 28, 1949.

⁶⁰ Truman to İnönü *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI*, 1657.

him about this issue and said that any discussion regarding it would be done in a strictly confidential format.⁶¹ Turkish foreign policy was focused on a security pact with the U.S. after the conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty.

On March 26, 1950, President İsmet İnönü met with General J. Lawton Collins and the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, George Wadsworth. The main topic of the meeting was Turkey's defense against possible Soviet aggression. According to the American version of the meeting, İnönü seemed to be expecting a war soon. When he observed that General Collins was very calm, he asked "How long before the next war?" Collins replied that in his view, the war was not imminent. When asked about the reason, Collins pointed out that the Soviets did not possess atomic bombs, had neither a substantial navy nor a large air force, and were already reaching some objectives without fighting. İnönü then inquired whether the U.S. would bombard the Soviet Union if it attacked Turkey. Collins replied that such an attack would be part of the Soviet Union's new world war scheme, and after Congress' approval, in his opinion, the U.S. would start bombarding the Soviet Union. General Collins' reply probably comforted İnönü, but he quickly pointed out that the thought of an attack against Turkey starting the Third World War was painful. He eventually pointed out the fact that there was no mutual defense pact between the U.S. and Turkey "Without any political commitment or agreement our two countries are working very closely together; Turkey has the very valuable statement of the President of the United States; and the personal opinions of American military and political leaders are that Turkey will not be left alone."⁶² Here, İnönü reminds us of Churchill and Roosevelt's threat in Cairo. He hoped that the U.S. would not leave Turkey alone in the event of a war. Still, the fact that he brings this issue up is a sign that events panned out in the way Churchill and Roosevelt described in Cairo.

Turkey's Ambassador to the U.S., Feridun Cemal Erkin, met with the Under Secretary of State, James E. Webb, on April 27, 1950, and once again raised Turkey's desire to be included in a formal security agreement. Webb gave the same answer to Erkin that the U.S. had been repeating. Once again, Erkin left empty-handed, as Webb argued that he was not in a position to provide him with a quick answer on this issue.⁶³ It is very clear that the U.S. did not consider tying itself to Turkey's security, and there was no reason to do so either. The memories

⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Greek, Turkish, and Iranian Affairs (Jernegan) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume VI*, 1684.

⁶² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of Staff, United States Army (Collins) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 1241-47.

⁶³ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Webb) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1252-53.

of Turkish neutrality were vivid, and the American public did not support an alliance with Turkey.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the Turkish side considered a formal security treaty with the U.S. a matter of life and death due to the Soviet Union's threats against its territorial integrity. What the Turkish side needed was a chance to redeem itself from the untrustworthy image that came alongside its neutrality policy during World War II. The Korean War would provide that opportunity.

V. The Price of Neutrality: Turkey's Intervention in the Korean War and the Making of a NATO Ally

The Democrat Party (DP) secured a resounding victory against the Republican People's Party, Atatürk, and İnönü's party, in Turkey's inaugural democratic election held on May 14, 1950. The main reason for the Democrat Party's sweeping victory was the public's dissatisfaction with the economic situation of Turkey. The Turkish Parliament elected Celal Bayar, the leader of Democrat Party, as the third President of the Republic on May 22, 1950. Bayar gave the task of forming the government to Adnan Menderes, who eventually became the Prime Minister. The Democrat Party's government program was not significantly different from that of the Republican People's Party. The main difference was in the economy, where the Democrat Party supported a liberal economic agenda with the help of privatization.⁶⁵

The Foreign Minister of the new government was Fuad Köprülü, a historian and arguably one of the best academics Turkey had at that time. Köprülü, the first Turkish national to be selected as a member of the Russian Sciences Academy, was expelled from the membership after he published academic articles debunking Russian arguments that Kars and Ardahan were originally Armenian lands.⁶⁶ As someone who knew the ins and outs of Soviet conduct, he was well aware of the importance of Turkey's alignment with the West in its quest to deter the Soviet Union. The Democrat Party's foreign policy, however, was on a similar path to that of the Republican People's Party. Just before the end of its tenure, the Republican People's Party formally applied to NATO for Turkish accession, which was eventually rejected.⁶⁷ The Democrat Party decided to follow the path that the Republican People's Party had left regarding Turkey's inclusion in the North Atlantic Pact.

⁶⁴ Çalis, *Turkey's Cold War*, 76.

⁶⁵ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 221–23.

⁶⁶ Orhan F. Köprülü, *Fuad Köprülü* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayını, 1987), 9.

⁶⁷ Çalis, *Turkey's Cold War*, 87–91.

The reaction of the Truman Administration towards the Democrat Party's election was simply a surprise. The Acting Secretary of State drafted a memorandum for Truman in which he suggested that the Democrat Party's victory was unexpected. He then added: "These elections represent the culmination of democratic development in Turkey, a country which, in a remarkably short period, has evolved from an absolute monarchy to a multi-party system, under the guidance of a benevolent dictatorship."⁶⁸ Turkey's Ambassador to the U.S., Feridun Cemal Erkin, also reported the admiration of his American counterparts due to the Democrat Party's election victory and suggested that Turkey had started to be seen as a model democracy in its region.⁶⁹ This perception of Turkey becoming a democratic "Westernized" country would eventually help it in getting a full membership to NATO. The Democrat Party's election greatly helped change the attitudes of Western countries towards Turkey, as they started to view Turkey as a nation that is slowly developing democratic institutions. The Democrat Party's victory eventually attracted foreign investment to Turkey's previously statist economy, benefiting the ordinary people's daily lives as well.⁷⁰

Feridun Cemal Erkin, Turkey's Ambassador to the U.S., met with R. A. Hare, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, on June 2, 1950, and inquired again about any news on Turkey's addition to a security pact. The answer, as usual, was negative. He told Hare that he would return to Turkey shortly and wanted to meet with James E. Webb, the Undersecretary of State. On June 14, Webb met with Erkin, and the main topic was the same. Erkin asked Webb whether he could "inform his Government that the inclusion of Turkey in a security arrangement with the United States was only a question of time." Webb replied that he was not in a position to make such a statement. According to Webb's memorandum, Erkin did not pursue the issue further, and the meeting came to an end.⁷¹ It is not hard to understand the frustration of Erkin since he was about to report to the newly elected government, and he did not want to go back to Ankara empty-handed. What he did not know was that a week later, the whole international situation would change.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea started its blitzkrieg attack against South Korea and changed the whole situation in the international arena. Truman Administration eventually decided that the U.S. had to help South Korea, and sent American combat troops to counter the

⁶⁸ Memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State to the President *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1262-63.

⁶⁹ "Turkish Diplomatic Archives (TDA) 23888 - 103612 - 1," May 19, 1950.

⁷⁰ Yaşar Baytal, "Demokrat Parti Dönemi Ekonomi Politikaları (1950-1957)," *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 10, no. 40 (2007): 545-67.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Webb) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1272-73.

North Korean attack. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 82 on June 25, which called for the immediate cessation of hostilities. Since North Korea did not accede, the Security Council adopted Resolution 83 on June 27, which called on the member states to furnish assistance to South Korea to “repel the armed attack and to restore international peace and security in the area.”⁷²

The immediate reaction of Turkish officials to this new development was one of surprise because they were expecting Soviet aggression somewhere in Europe, just like their American counterparts. The new leadership of Turkey under the Democrat Party deeply contemplated the Korean War. Feridun Cemal Erkin, who came from Washington to brief the new government on Turkish-American relations, found himself in the middle of the discussion. In his memoir, Erkin recalls the time the Korean War was discussed among the high cadres of Turkish politics. During his stay in Istanbul, in the middle of one night, Erkin was informed that President Celal Bayar planned to go to Yalova by boat and wanted Erkin to accompany him during the travel. When Erkin took the Presidential boat from the Moda district of Istanbul, he observed that President Bayar was with Prime Minister Menderes and the Speaker of the Parliament, Refik Koraltan. Menderes informed Erkin that the Turkish government received UN Security Council Resolution number 83, signed by Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the UN, which called on member states to assist South Korea. Menderes then asked for the Ambassador's opinion. Erkin said, “There can be no hesitation, we have to accept the request.” However, Bayar and Menderes did not seem to appreciate his view and challenged him throughout the conversation. Eventually, Menderes jeeringly asked, “What are you talking about, Mr. Feridun? Our borders are disputed and threatened by a powerful neighbor. Don't you pay attention to the threat of the Soviet Union, which would regard an objection to [North Korea's attack] as a provocation?”⁷³ Erkin replied: “Mr. Prime Minister your objection strengthens my view. If we show no interest in the attack against South Korea, who would come to our help when we are attacked by the neighbor you mentioned in the future?”⁷⁴ After hearing this reply, Menderes turned to Bayar and said: “As you see Mr. President, our Ambassador's point of view is totally in line with us on this matter.” It seems that in this conversation, Bayar and Menderes employed the Socratic method and used counterarguments to their arguments to see the defects of their position, which Erkin defended. When the Presidential boat approached

⁷² “United Nations Security Council Resolution 82, ‘Complaint of Aggression upon the Republic of Korea,’” 1950, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/82>; “United Nations Security Council Resolution 83, ‘Complaint of Aggression upon the Republic of Korea,’” 1950, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/83>.

⁷³ Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl Vaşington Büyükelçiliği II. Cilt, I. Kısım*, 153.

⁷⁴ Erkin, 153–54.

Yalova, Selim Sarper, Turkey's permanent representative at the UN, also joined the conversation. Even though he agreed with the idea of sending troops to support South Korea, he suggested that this proposal be conditional upon Turkey's admittance to NATO. Erkin replied that Turkey should not put any conditions on its decision since it would diminish its value. According to him, Turkey was supposed to display its support for the free world while pursuing NATO membership. Menderes also accepted this view.⁷⁵

George Wadsworth, the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, met with Turkish Foreign Minister Fuad Köprülü on July 22, 1950. Wadsworth started the conversation with the UN's Resolution 83, which asked member states to send ground troops to support South Korea. Without hesitation, Köprülü said that they are planning to reply positively, which would "bear witness to [Turkey's] sincere desire manifest by practical action its loyalty to the UN and Turk-US collaboration." He added that the Turkish government wished that their response would "conform with US policy and public opinion." Wadsworth, in reply, urged Köprülü to dispatch a combat unit between 4,000 to 4,500 men. Wadsworth commented on Köprülü's thinking process in his memorandum: "There was no doubt in my mind that he sensed his country on the verge [of] its most important post-war decision or that he was wholly sincere." What Wadsworth did not know was that on July 18, 1950, the cabinet met in Yalova and already decided to send ground troops to Korea. The Turkish side initially planned to send a full division of around 15,000 men which would be at the forefront of the war and display Turkey's full commitment to the UN. When Wadsworth met with the Defense Minister and Chief of Staff of Turkey, the Chief of Staff Gen. Nuri Yamut showed him an informal memorandum that Maj. Gen. Yusuf A. Egeli, a general staff, wrote to him about the Korean War. Egeli argued that "it will be the greatest crime in Turkish history if we fail to take advantage of this, opportunity."⁷⁶ Here, it is clear that the Turkish side perceived the Korean War as a chance to showcase its full support and loyalty to the Western pact, which was not done during World War II due to Turkey's neutrality-based foreign policy. This time, however, Turkey was determined to seize the heaven-sent opportunity and eliminate the negative perception of itself in the mindset of its Western allies, especially the U.S.

After the U.S., Turkey became the second country to answer UN Resolution 83 positively by promising to supply combat troops. When Ambassador Wadsworth met with Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, he provided Ambassador Wadsworth with the internal

⁷⁵ Erkin, 154.

⁷⁶ The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1281–82.

perception of the Turkish ruling cadres: “The Korean war has opened a new era, one in which we must strive harder and work faster towards common objectives. We will not be Utopians but apply ourselves to practical realities.”⁷⁷ Surprisingly, the Turks fully grasped the nature of the Korean War in the sense that it offered Turkey another chance after World War II to redeem itself and prove that it could become a trustworthy ally. It should be stressed that the main motivation behind Turkey’s decision to intervene in the Korean War was not to join NATO. Neither Turkish nor American archival documents show a discussion linking Turkey’s decision to its NATO membership. Instead, both Turkish and American archival sources indicate that Turkey’s decision was taken first and foremost to demonstrate its solidarity with NATO allies. Turkey had to showcase its solidarity with Western allies primarily because it had not done so during World War II, losing valuable confidence in the process. Therefore, Turkey’s decision to intervene in the Korean War was, in essence, the price of neutrality.

Following Turkey’s official declaration of its intention to deploy 4,500 combat troops to engage in the Korean conflict under the auspices of the United Nations, the response from the Turkish public was predominantly favorable. On July 27, an opinion piece entitled “The Decision of the Government” was penned by Nadir Nadi, the esteemed founder of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, and prominently featured on its front page. Within this op-ed, Nadi posited that the Turkish government’s resolute determination to participate in the conflict would effectively address the question of the United Nations’ viability as a stable international institution. He further contended that Turkey’s leadership in this endeavor could potentially pave the way for other peace-oriented nations to follow suit.⁷⁸ Nadi’s article unmistakably indicates that the prevailing sentiment concerning Turkey’s military involvement in the Korean War was overwhelmingly positive. However, a notable dissenting voice emerged in the form of the Turkish Peace-lovers Association (*Türk Barışseverler Cemiyeti*), spearheaded by Behice Boran. On July 28, the group distributed pamphlets at Galata Bridge, expressing opposition to Turkey’s decision to dispatch combat troops to Korea. Their position was based on the argument that Turkey’s security and future prospects would not gain in any noticeable way from such participation.⁷⁹

The Republican People’s Party, now an opposition party after a long stint of one-party rule, disagreed with the Democrat Party on the procedure of deciding to send troops outside Turkey. They argued that the National Assembly should have decided on the deployment of

⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1289.

⁷⁸ Nadir Nadi, “Hükümetin Kararı,” *Cumhuriyet*, July 27, 1950.

⁷⁹ “Türk Barışseverler Cemiyeti Bildirisi,” July 22, 1950.

Turkish troops outside Turkey instead of the Council of Ministers.⁸⁰ However, after some time, certain elements within the Republican People's Party began to criticize the Democrat Party's decision, arguing that the Republican People's Party had successfully kept Turkey out of the war during World War II, whereas the Democrat Party failed to do so. On July 28, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes addressed these criticisms at a news conference in the Prime Ministry of Turkey. He refuted the Republican People's Party's claim of keeping Turkey out of World War II, asserting that it lacked a factual basis. Menderes added: "The main reason why there was no dispute regarding this issue is because of our patriotic concern not to engage in arguments concerning foreign policy-related matters." He contended that the calamities of the World War II era stemmed from "every nation's separate effort to protect peace" and the mistaken belief that each nation could single-handedly counter threats. Menderes then turned to the topic of neutrality, asserting that hesitancy and indecisive actions "would not shield us against the threats facing the world."⁸¹ Menderes' refutation of the World War II era neutrality policy, essentially unveils the inadequacies inherent in such a policy. Turkey sought inclusion in the security apparatus established by the Western pact, and adhering to the neutrality policy of that era would have inevitably amplified the isolation experienced by Turkey in the aftermath of World War II.

In Washington, Turkey's Ambassador to the U.S., Feridun Cemal Erkin, persisted in exerting pressure on his counterparts regarding Turkey's inclusion into a security pact with the U.S. However, this time, the atmosphere was noticeably different. During their private meeting, Erkin apprised Secretary of State Acheson that the Turkish public exhibited a strong willingness to join the Western community. He urged Acheson to reconsider Turkey's inclusion in the security pact. In response, Acheson conveyed that Turkey held a highly esteemed status in the U.S.⁸² Instead of receiving clear-cut negative replies to Turkey's request, Erkin began to encounter much more sympathetic responses, which arose as a consequence of Turkey's unwavering support in the Korean War. Following Erkin's meeting with Acheson, the Joint Chiefs of Staff commenced deliberations on Turkey's formal inclusion into NATO. As part of these discussions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff entertained the notion of granting a consultative status in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to Turkey and Greece, among other potential

⁸⁰ TBMM, *Tutanak Dergisi Dönem IX*, 1950, 56–58.

⁸¹ "Prime Ministerial Archives of Turkey (BCA)," 1950, 30100-12751.

⁸² Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, Foreign Relations of the United States *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1301.

measures.⁸³ This, in itself, serves as evidence that Turkey's deployment of combat troops altered Washington's attitude towards Ankara, albeit not entirely. Erkin's unrelenting full-pressure campaign persisted, as demonstrated in his telephone discussion with Burton Y. Berry, the Deputy Assistant Secretary. On each occasion, Erkin highlighted the mounting pressure from the Turkish public.⁸⁴ The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, George Wadsworth, also explained the situation from his point of view:

I have been increasingly impressed by its sincerity and wide public support; and I have shared growing conviction my staff and friendly colleagues that domestic position present, sincerely cooperative government will be seriously weakened if its request not be granted.

Wadsworth also mentioned his discussion with President Celal Bayar in which Turkish membership in NATO was also discussed. Bayar said:

we are sincerely grateful for the very considerable contribution to our national strength you have made in the economic field as well. But there is a third and today even more important field, the political-strategic field, in which we sense a hesitancy on your part. We do not understand it. I speak not only as President but more particularly as a Turk. We wish to join the Atlantic Pact and bring our full cooperation to mutual defense of the western democratic world of which we truly feel ourselves a part... Does your Government not realize that we Turks will consider further deferment of favorable action on our request by the Atlantic Pact powers as a refusal and as unwillingness to accept us as equal partners in meeting jointly any threat of aggression? We have shown our good faith by forthright action towards meeting the Korean crisis. I fear frankly that, if Atlantic Pact Council of Foreign Ministers turns down our request, our morale will be seriously affected. We are not a people readily influenced by propaganda. In this matter, however, there is widespread concern and uncertainty. We feel our very future is at stake.⁸⁵

Here, President Bayar reiterates the fact that Turkey did not perceive its involvement in the Korean War as a give-and-take situation, wherein Turkey expected its admission to NATO

⁸³ Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Johnson) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1308.

⁸⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1311.

⁸⁵ The Ambassador in Turkey (Wadsworth) to the Secretary of State *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa, Volume V*, 1312–13.

automatically following its decision to intervene in the Korean War. Instead, Turkey viewed the Korean War as an opportunity to demonstrate its solidarity with the Western allies. The Korean War served as a litmus test for Turkey, allowing the U.S. to discern the genuine intentions of the former.

While Bayar and other Turkish politicians were exerting pressure on their counterparts in the U.S., the Turkish brigade, led by Brigadier General Tahsin Yazıcı, arrived in Korea on October 17, 1950.⁸⁶ After a month-long training in the city of Taegu, the Turkish Brigade was attached to the U.S. Army 25th Infantry Division, with its primary mission being to suppress counter-guerrilla movements behind the rear of the U.S. advanced forces in North Korea. The Turkish Brigade's combat debut occurred during the Second Chinese Offensive in Korea. On November 26, 1950, Major General John B. Coulter ordered the Turkish Brigade to secure the town of Tokchon and the road between Kunu-ri and Tokchon, aiming to establish a defensive line against the Chinese troops. During the battles at Kunu-ri and subsequent engagements, while retreating to South Korea, the Turkish Brigade suffered approximately 400 casualties, marking the highest number of losses the Brigade experienced during its stationing in South Korea until 1971.⁸⁷ However, as Gavin D. Brockett argued, the “legend of Turk” in Korea began with these battles, exerting an immense impact on the formation of the Turkish national identity.⁸⁸ After the Kunu-ri Battle, the American press abruptly shifted its focus to the Turkish Brigade, portraying it as a fearless unit. Feridun Cemal Erkin, Turkey’s Ambassador to the U.S., confirmed this observation by reporting that the volume of favorable news concerning the Turkish Brigade increased steadily in Washington during this period.⁸⁹

Amidst the prevailing positive sentiment towards Turkey in the American public due to the popularity of the Turkish Brigade, a significant conference was convened involving both Turkish and American officials. During this gathering, Turkish officials continued their longstanding efforts to advocate for Turkey's inclusion in a security pact with the United States. Notably, George McGhee, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern South Asian-African Affairs, openly proposed for the first time that the U.S. Department of State give serious consideration to the admission of Turkey and Greece into NATO.⁹⁰ McGhee emerged as a prominent

⁸⁶ Tahsin Yazıcı, *Kore Hatıralarım* (İstanbul: Ülkü Basımevi, 1963), 100.

⁸⁷ Mesut Uyar and Serhat Güvenç, “One Battle and Two Accounts: The Turkish Brigade at Kunu-Ri in November 1950,” *Journal of Military History* 80, no. 4 (2016): 1117–47.

⁸⁸ Brockett, Gavin D. Brockett, “The Legend of ‘The Turk’ in Korea: Popular Perceptions of the Korean War and Their Importance to a Turkish National Identity,” *War & Society* 22, no. 2 (2004): 109–42.

⁸⁹ Erkin, *Dışişlerinde 34 Yıl Vaşington Büyükelçiliği II. Cilt, I. Kısım*, 213.

⁹⁰ McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey’s NATO Entry Contained the Soviets*, 82.

proponent of Turkey's inclusion in NATO. In his oral history interview, he asserted that the primary rationale behind his advocacy for Turkey's NATO membership was the apprehension of a potential Turkish-Soviet rapprochement.⁹¹ In his press statement after the conference, McGhee specifically mentioned Turkish intervention in the Korean War as a satisfactory development.⁹² Following McGhee's suggestion, Secretary of State Acheson engaged General Marshall to explore the possibility of a favorable stance on Turkish inclusion in NATO.

Two major camps emerged in the State Department while evaluating Turkey's admission into NATO. One side suggested that even without Turkey's formal admission into NATO, it would cooperate with the U.S., so there was no need for the U.S. to push for Turkey's admittance into NATO. The other side, on the other hand, argued that a formal security agreement was needed to guarantee Turkey's full commitment to the U.S.' cause. George Wadsworth, the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, explained: "Unless we are prepared to come through with a commitment of real value to the Turks they would repeat last war's 'friendly neutrality' policy, block the straights, trade with both sides, and hope we would defeat the Moscovs." A subordinate who read Wadsworth's telegram noted, "I also believe that, given certain conditions, the Turks might 'weasel' on us."⁹³ As this document clearly shows, even those who supported Turkey's formal entry into NATO had doubts regarding Turkey's future behavior due to its neutrality policy during World War II. Turkey's untrustworthy image stemming from its World War II era neutrality policy haunted the U.S. policymakers. The Turkish side, however, skillfully used the Korean conflict to dispel the lingering image of untrustworthiness. The aforementioned document demonstrates that the Turkish side was unable to completely dispel the image of untrustworthiness in the minds of American policymakers. However, despite reservations about Turkey's future behavior, the U.S. decided to admit it into NATO, fearing that not doing so would jeopardize Turkish cooperation in the broader Cold War struggle.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Richard D. McKinzie, "Oral History Interview with George C. McGhee," June 11, 1975, 57, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/oral-histories/mcgheeg>.

⁹² McGhee, *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey's NATO Entry Contained the Soviets*, 84.

⁹³ Danforth, Nicholas L., *The Remaking of Republican Turkey Memory and Modernity Since the Fall of the Ottoman Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 157.

⁹⁴ Danforth, *The Remaking of Republican Turkey*, pp. 156-7.

VI. Conclusion

Turkey repeatedly assured its allies, Britain and France, of its intention to join World War II, but ultimately failed to honor these commitments. This led to a significant loss of credibility that proved difficult to overcome. Post-war, faced with a hostile Soviet Union, Turkey sought closer ties with Western allies. However, suspicions persisted due to Turkey's neutral stance during the war. Despite Turkey's keen interest in joining NATO and multiple applications, Western allies hesitated to include Turkey in their security framework. Turkish and other archival sources indicate that the primary reason for this exclusion was the lack of trust stemming from Turkey's neutrality during World War II. Scholarly work on Turkish diplomatic history has long overlooked the connection between Turkey's World War II neutrality and its decision to intervene in the Korean War. This research bridges this gap, arguing that Turkey's involvement in the Korean War was a direct consequence of its earlier neutrality, aiming to restore its credibility on the international stage.

This article leverages newly declassified Turkish archives and other relevant sources to argue that Turkey's neutral stance during World War II resulted in a loss of international credibility. This diminished trust significantly impacted Turkey's standing as a potential ally, compelling it to adopt a more proactive role in global affairs. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 presented Turkish leaders with a chance to shed their nation's untrustworthy image, a direct consequence of their World War II neutrality. Turkish policymakers saw the Korean conflict as an opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with Western powers, something they had failed to do during World War II. The research posits that Turkey's primary motivation for intervening in the Korean War was to restore the credibility lost due to its World War II neutrality policy. This case underscores how major foreign policy decisions, such as Turkey's World War II neutrality, can have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on a nation's international relations and future policy choices.

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