

SURVIVING THE PRESSURE OF THE SUPERPOWERS: AN ANALYSIS OF TURKISH NEUTRALITY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Murat Metin Hakki, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University

Introduction

The Second World War years indisputably constitute one of the most important periods of modern Turkish history. Yet, it is perhaps amongst those topics on which there is not a satisfactory amount of academic work available. It has been observed that Turkish historians have rather tended to show greater interest in earlier periods of history, when the Turkish nation played a more crucial role on a world scale. Many of those pieces that deal with it are either too superficial or are based on the 'official' accounts of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs or of the politicians of those days. Certain examples may be cited in this respect.

The book written by Ismet Bozdog, *Toprakta Bile Bitmeyen Kavga (Ataturk-Inonu, Inonu-Bayar)* — (The conflict that did not end even in the grave (Ataturk-Inonu, Inonu-Bayar)) is amongst the very few available that openly discuss the circumstances that led to Inonu's presidency. The collective work by a group of prominent Turkish scholars, *Turk Dis Politikasi, Kurtulus Savasi'ndan Bugune Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt I (1919-1980)* — (Turkish foreign policy from the War of Liberation up to today, vol. I (1919-1980)) provides documentary materials of great interest, but do not discuss in detail the impact of foreign policy on domestic affairs at the time.

The famous Turkish historian, Sevket Sureyya Aydemir, adopts a pro-Inonu approach in *Ikinci Adam* (1938-1950) and does not elaborate much on Turkey's pro-German stance between 1941-1943, as well as the pan-Turkist card that Germany attempted to use in that era. He also does not adopt a critical approach on the areas where the domestic strategies Inonu pursued in that era were manifestly inappropriate as in the tax on wealth issue discussed below. I have endeavored to rely on an article written by Saban Calis (*Pan-Turkism and Europeanism: a note on Turkey's pro-German neutrality during the Second World War*) and the book written by Ayhan Aktar (*Varlik Vergisi ve `Turklestirme' Politikolari — Tax on wealth law and the `Turkification' policies*) to clarify those issues further. None of the materials has attempted to weigh in detail the gains that Turkey might have made if it had joined the war on the side of the US and UK after the second Cairo Conference in December 1943.

This article has been prepared with the intent of shedding a bit more light on the political strategies of the Inonu administration between 1939 and 1945. Amongst other things, it touches upon such issues as the German sponsored pan-Turkist movements in Turkey and offers a detailed account of the bargaining process between Turkey and the great powers during the important stages of the war. Regard is also given to the mood towards the great powers around that time amongst the public and key politicians.

1. The Road to War

The First World War failed to resolve the basic conflicts among the European powers. The so-called 'new world order' was designed in a way that would ensure the imperialist hegemony of few European powers. Injustices inherent in the Versailles

Peace Settlement only aggravated the complicated national questions, which bedevilled the whole of Europe. The United States' resumption of isolationist policies and refusal to join the League of Nations eventually led to the collapse of the world's political system. The military, political and economic developments that followed 1918 drove the European world towards a new grouping of powers. Germany and Italy decided to form the famous Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936.¹ A point was then reached where the establishment of strongholds needed to cut off these countries' route to the Mediterranean and her colonies.²

1.1. The Birth of a Tri-partite Alliance

Turkey was a country that successfully pursued revisionist policies in the early 1920s. Having set up a people's government in the remote Anatolian town of Angora (now Ankara) that refused to recognize the puppet monarch under British control in Constantinople/Istanbul, Kemal Ataturk and the forces loyal to him drove their enemies out of Asia Minor and set up an independent republic in 1923. His struggles were crowned by the Treaty of Lausanne that scrapped the humiliating Sevres Treaty signed in 1920 after the defeat of Turkey at the First World War. Still, the Turks still could not reverse the loss of places such as the oil rich cities of Mosul-Kirkuk (northern Iraq), the Aegean islands and Western Thrace (north eastern Greece) where Ataturk himself was born.

Despite this, the Italian threat to her coasts that resurfaced after the operation in Ethiopia prompted Turkey to approach the Western powers which believed in the

¹ Y. Guclu, "Turco-British Relations on the Even of the Second World War", Middle Eastern Studies 39 (2003), p. 159.

² Ibid., p. 160.

general preservation of the status quo ante. The oral guarantees given to Turkey by Italy during the Ethiopian crisis could not soothe Turkish concerns. Only a few years before (in 1925), Italy had threatened to invade the Mediterranean shores of Asia Minor if Turkey went to war with Britain over the control of the oil rich Mosul city in today's northern Iraq. On the other hand, the Italian offer of an alliance (made in 1935) between Italy, Greece and Turkey was rejected outright by Turkey on the grounds that the Balkan Pact, a mutual defense agreement signed in 1934 between Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Yugoslavia, intended to guarantee the signatories' territorial integrity and political independence against attack by another Balkan state, could be rendered practically inoperative.³ The Conferences held in Montreux and Nyon in 1936 and 1937 respectively did a great deal in paving the way for future understanding between the three countries.⁴

1.2. Ataturk dies, Inonu becomes President

Kemal Ataturk and Ismet Inonu knew each other from military school. During the War of Liberation (1919-1922), they fought against the Greeks together. While Ataturk was the Commander-in-Chief, Inonu was his main comrade-in-arms. After the war, Inonu served as the main negotiator at the peace talks held in Lausanne. Ataturk appointed him as his Prime Minister on several occasions. However, deep ideological differences on how best to develop the poor Turkish economy and reform Turkish

³ I. Uzgel, "Italya ile Iliskiler" in B. Oran, (ed), *Turk Dis Politikasi, Kurtulus Savasi'ndan Bugune Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, (1919-1980) (2 vols, Istanbul 2000), pp. i, 295.

⁴ Guclu, p. 168.

society pushed them apart. Inonu was dismissed in 1937 and the more 'liberal' Celal Bayar was appointed Prime Minister.⁵

Another issue that led to disagreement between them concerned the method to solve the 'Hatay dispute' between Turkey and France. Ataturk is believed to have remained dissatisfied with the territorial gains made by the Lausanne Treaty.⁶ According to this theory, he still wanted to get some remaining neighboring Turkish speaking territories annexed to the mainland through peaceful means by active diplomacy, exploiting the right circumstances whenever they arose. With a war in Europe approaching in late 1930s, he wanted to negotiate the surrender of the Hatay (Alexandretta) province of Syria by the French who were keen on securing Turkish cooperation in the area. But Inonu was someone who maintained a 'highly cautious' approach with respect to both his economic and foreign policies. He feared that France would be thereby offended and opposed such moves.⁷ Their relationship never fully recovered and this continued until Ataturk's death. Some even rumored that certain circles close to Ataturk saw Inonu as a danger to the future of the Turkish state and realizing that Ataturk was terminally ill they plotted an assassination attempt against him in 1938 to prevent his becoming Ataturk's successor.⁸

After Ataturk passed away on 10 November 1938, many people in the outside world feared chaos similar to the one that ensued in the Soviet Union following Lenin's death. It was believed that Ataturk preferred Fevzi Cakmak, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish army, to succeed him. Nevertheless, seeing that Inonu was favored

⁵ I. Bozdog, *Toprakta Bile Bitmeyen Kavga (Ataturk-Inonu, Inonu-Bayar)*, (Istanbul, 1993), p. 27.

⁶ Adapted from: <http://www.kamubirlikhareketi.com>

⁷ Bozdog, p. 144.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

amongst the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP) delegates, Prime Minister Bayar opened the way for Inonu's presidency in the name of averting political chaos before a likely war in Europe.⁹ On 11 November, Inonu took his oath as new leader and president of Turkey and resumed office after a symbolic vote in parliament.¹⁰ In the absence of a multiparty democracy at the time, as a president and the chairman of the only party in the country, he was the one who had the final say on most matters.

1.3. Revival of Anglo-Turkish partnership

For a while, the arrival of Chamberlain to power in the UK in May 1937, and the so-called 'appeasement' policies he followed for over a year, meant that Britain would not deepen her partnership with Turkey in a way that could frustrate Italy.¹¹ But seeing the German aggression in early 1939, the idea of an alliance with Turkey to strengthen her position in the Mediterranean once again appeared attractive to Britain. The fall of Bohemia and Moravia to the Germans and Albania to Italy led to the signing of the Anglo-Turkish declaration of mutual co-operation and assistance agreement (on 12 May 1939) aimed at guarding against other advances in the area. This prompted Mussolini whole-heartedly to commit Italy to the German cause by strengthening his alliance with Hitler through the Pact of Steel,¹² signed ten days later.

Once France solved her border dispute with Turkey by transferring the province of Hatay¹³ on 23 June, an almost identical declaration was issued by Ankara and Paris.

⁹ Ibid., p. 222.

¹⁰ D. Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929-1939*, (New York: 1998), p. 199.

¹¹ Council of Ministers Discussions (CAB) 23/86, Cab. 63 (36), 4 Nov. 1938.

¹² For the terms, see: <http://ww2.boom.ru/Africa/390522.html>.

¹³ From 1920 until 1946, Syria remained a French mandate.

These declarations were subsequently transformed into a tripartite pact in October of that year. Protocol No. 2 absolved Turkey from any action calculated to bring it into conflict with the Soviet Union. Article 6 lay down that Turkey was not obliged to fulfil the obligations of the political treaty until after it had received delivery on all the outstanding war materials on order as well as the new orders to be decided by the commission and the gold loan. As will be seen below, these two provisions played a crucial role in helping Turkey in adopting a policy of neutrality at later stages.

2. The Second World War begins

The increased the tension between Germany and Poland over the German populated 'free city' of Danzig triggered the Second World War on 1 September.¹⁴ Around the time that the war started, Turkey was aiming to be on the same side as Britain, France and the USSR. Still, the Turkish plans on these lines were frustrated by the sudden formation of a loose alliance between Stalin and Hitler leading to the partition of Poland between the two powers; and the heightened tension in Turco-Soviet relations once both sides failed to reach an agreement subsequent to the Soviet demands for a revision of the 1936 Montreux Accords governing the regime on the use of the Straits.

According to Refik Saydam, the then Turkish Prime Minister, it was not possible for Turkey to meet Soviet demands because allowing for the possibility of a 'joint' Turco-Soviet defence of the Straits would be potentially incompatible with the tripartite pact with France and Britain. Such a proposal could have had the potential of separating

¹⁴ S. S. Aydemir, *Ikinci Adam*, (Istanbul, 2000), p. 237.

Turkey from her other allies and forcing her to join the German camp if the Soviets ended up facing France and Britain on Germany's side.¹⁵

Inonu was also against the idea of risking a potential confrontation with the USSR as a result of actively collaborating with Britain and France. The Soviet Union was extensive geographically and militarily formidable. Moreover, its borders joined Turkey. In view of this, from the beginning of the war, Turkey started resorting to delaying tactics to avoid the seemingly inevitable confrontation for as long as possible.¹⁶ In that way it managed to avoid having to enter war on the side of the British and French, and also avoided an attack by Germany. It will be observed that while preserving her neutrality, the country generally collaborated more with whichever side appeared stronger throughout the war.

2.1 Turkish resort to delaying tactics

The most critical stage of the war for Turkey was 1940 when Turkish foreign policy planners faced great difficulty in the application of their policies. It was a year of severe crises and unforeseen events. 'When the Turks, the French and the British signed an alliance it was impossible to foresee either the German successes in Western Europe and the developments which brought the Axis to the very doors of Turkey, or the threat of complete hostile encirclement ...'.¹⁷ In the previous year during the treaty negotiations, the British had spoken in terms of the 'Maginot line' and the French having 'the best existing land defenses in the world', this making a 'direct attack on France

¹⁵ F. Armaogu, "İkinci Dünya Harbi'nde Türkiye", *Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 13 (1958), p. 147.

¹⁶ Aydemir, p. 122.

¹⁷ T. Ataov, *Turkish Foreign Policy 1939-1945*, (Ankara, 1965), p. 66.

most unlikely'. They had also spoken of a 'Polish offensive in the East'.¹⁸ Given what actually happened, it was hardly surprising that Turkey kept her reserve.

2.2. The Baku Affair

The Soviet gains in Poland, the Baltic States and Finland worried the French who now looked for some way of crippling the Soviet Union's war potential by opening a theatre of war geographically distant from France.¹⁹ Also, Baku oil was being exported to Germany. Between January 1940 and June 1941, the Soviets delivered sixteen million barrels of oil. The Germans had hoped to share in the exploitation of Soviet oil but Stalin was not willing to go that far.²⁰ The French felt Baku could only be hit by aerial attack through the use of Turkish airspace. However, the Turkish resistance against the use of her airspace plus the German success in Norway and its consequences ruled out of practical consideration the project for an attack on Caucasian oilfields.²¹

2.3. France Surrenders, Italy joins the War

After several months spent occupying territories in the north and the east of their country, the Germans finally started moving westwards. On 10 May 1940, they invaded Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The conquest of France began as the army crossed the Meuse River on the 13th. It took Hitler only a month to knock out France. Paris fell on 14 June and in just four weeks' time the puppet Vichy regime was

¹⁸ *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Disisleri Bakanligi Arsivleri/Archives of the Turkish Foreign Ministry*, F.O. 371/E4151/143/44.

¹⁹ S. Deringil, "The Preservation of Turkey's Neutrality during the Second World War: 1940", *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1982), p. 31.

²⁰ A. J. Kinghoffer, *The Soviet Union and International Oil Politics*, (New York, 1977), p. 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*

established. Deceived by the impressive German performance, Mussolini immediately declared war and joined Germany. The Italian declaration of War on 10 June triggered Turkey's obligations under the tripartite pact to join the war alongside Britain. Esmer, a Turkish writer, believes that France, although it knew it was losing the war, was pushing for Turkish entry hoping to use this as a counterweight to secure more favorable armistice terms from the Germans.²² Yet, Turkey invoked these three legal grounds²³ in an effort to evade such an obligation:

(a) The tripartite Alliance had been made with Britain and France and as France had withdrawn from the war through a ceasefire, one of the two countries which were supposed to help Turkey could no longer do so. Seen in that light, the allegation that Turkey was obliged to join the war ran counter to the tenor of the pact.

(b) The Additional Protocol No. 2 attached to the alliance agreement absolved Turkey from any action calculated to bring her into conflict with the Soviet Union. As the invasion of Poland could demonstrate, Turkey could be threatened with Soviet invasion. This precluded Turkish participation in the war.²⁴

(c) Article 6 laid down that Turkey was not obliged to fulfil the obligations of the political treaty until after it had received delivery on all the outstanding war materials on order. Until the end of the war, Turkey continued arguing that the arms aid made to her was insufficient. Turkey also argued that a Turkish participation in the war would do nothing more than spread it to the

²² Deringil, "The Preservation", p. 36.

²³ B. Oran, "Savas Disi Kalmak Icin One Surulen Hukuksal Gerekseler", in Oran (ed.), *Turk Dis Politikas*, pp., I, 394.

²⁴ Protocol No. 2 was also invoked when Italy invaded Greece, Turkey's neighbor.

Mediterranean — something that would increase the burden on her allies even more.

On the other hand, the Balkan Pact was interpreted as being concerned with the preservation of 'intra-Balkan borders' only. Upon Greece's special request at the time of signing, threats coming from a 'non-Balkan country' (like Italy) were deemed to be outside the scope of this accord. Seen in that light, it did not trigger any obligation on the part of Turkey to enter the war. But, Turkey found the courage to warn Bulgaria, a Balkan country that was not a member of the Balkan Pact, to stay out of Greece.²⁵ The Italians completed the invasion on their own.²⁶

After Dunkirk, the Turkish Assembly was extremely active in examining the situation. There were those like Fazil Ahmet (Elazig) and Hikmet Bayur (Manisa) who felt Turkey had to go to the aid of the British and French forces and that public opinion should be prepared for war. There were also those who felt Turkey had acted with undue haste in concluding the Alliance. Many MPs had their doubts: 'It was possible that we were once more fated to join the weak side. We began to feel the vociferous presence of those opposed to the Anglo-Turkish Alliance'.²⁷

2.4. Turkey: an invaluable bargaining chip that affected the fate of the War

By the summer of 1941, the Nazi army was at the borders of western Turkey. President Inonu knew that there were two options for Hitler: descending to the Middle

²⁵ Aydemir, p. 146.

²⁶ Although Bulgaria did not join the occupation of Greece, it nevertheless 'officially' forged an alliance with the Axis Powers on 1 March 1941.

²⁷ Deringil, "The Preservation", p. 34.

East through an invasion of Turkey; or attacking the USSR from the west.²⁸ The following shaped the crucial decision. On 2 April 1941, Rashid Ali Gaylani, a former Prime Minister of Iraq well known for his anti-British stance, organized a coup and seized power. To continue clinging to power he asked for German assistance. This tremendously increased the German pressure on Turkey to allow the Nazis to pass to Iraq through eastern Anatolia and help their ally. Above all, a German occupation of a Persian Gulf state could ultimately have helped unite their forces with Japanese forces along the Indian Ocean.²⁹ Nevertheless, the British acted quickly and restored their power in the country by May. This was a factor that contributed to a decrease in German enthusiasm for intervention in the Middle East urgently.

German expansion towards the Balkans and Eastern Europe — areas traditionally considered within the Soviet sphere of influence — increased Soviet distrust towards Hitler and shook the bonds of friendship with Germany. In relation to the effect of this situation on Soviet-German relations, A.S. Esmer wrote this comment in the newspaper *Ulus*: 'Now, the Soviet lands from north to south are neighboring lands under German occupation. If the Soviets take one step anywhere at all, they are bound to tread on Germany's toes'.³⁰ Still, the parties held talks in November 1940 with a view to determining the conditions for a possible 'active' Soviet alliance with Germany in the war.

At the talks, Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, told Hitler that the Soviet Union considered the Straits vital to her security and wanted to give Bulgaria, the country nearest the Straits, a guarantee similar to that given by Germany to Romania. Hitler felt

²⁸ M. Toker, *Demokrasimizin Ismet Pasa'li Yillari 1944-1973: Tek Partiden Cok Partiye 1944-1950* (Istanbul, 1998), p. 20.

²⁹ M. Aydin, "1941-1943: German Pressures over Turkey", in Oran (ed.), *Turk Dis Politikasi*, pp. i, 442.

³⁰ Deringil, "The Preservation", p. 46.

suspicious of such a move and asked if Bulgaria had asked for such a guarantee. Molotov also insisted that before the Soviet Union would agree to join the Axis it would require 'a base for naval and air forces on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles' and recognition that the area south of Batum and Baku in the direction of the Persian Gulf was the 'center of the aspirations of the Soviet Union'.³¹ Once again, the extreme strategic importance of the Straits saved Turkey. The Soviet demands showed the Germans that there could be no further cooperation with the Soviet Union. Like the Soviet Union, Germany had no intention of sharing the Straits with anyone. Three weeks after the Soviet minister left Berlin, Hitler made his final order and demanded preparation for Operation Barbarossa.³²

Even though the Soviet Union was in disagreement with the West, and had a preliminary agreement with the Nazis, it was obvious from the beginning that the German-Soviet partnership was doomed to fail soon or later.³³ Hitler was likely to need more territory in the East as part of his desires for Lebensraum. Secondly, there was an ideological war between 'fascism' and 'communism'. With communism and the USSR standing, Nazism would find it difficult to expand beyond Europe.

Upon receiving the news of a German attack on the USSR, Omer Inonu promptly went to wake his father. Hearing the news, the president stared at his son's face for a few moments. Then he stood in his bed and started laughing continuously for nearly ten minutes.³⁴ These laughs demonstrated a release of tension by someone who had been

³¹ R. J. Sonntag and J. S. Beddi, *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941*, (Westport CN, 1976), pp. 244-6.

³² Deringil, "The Preservation", p. 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁴ Toker, p. 21.

under enormous stress for the last two years. They were well deserved. Turkey had just managed to avert the biggest menace waiting at her doorstep.

3. (1941-1943): pro-German neutrality and the surge of nationalism in Turkey

Having examined Turkish policy in the initial phases of the war, let us now turn to comment on how Turkey managed to keep Germany out of her borders by adopting a pro-German attitude between 1941 and 1943. In the eyes of Hitler, the developments in Iraq undermined Turkey's strategic value as a bridge between the German controlled Eastern Europe and the Middle East.³⁵ Still, what then gained in importance was Turkish neutrality, crucial for the preservation of the German army's right wing on the eve of an attack against the USSR. In that way, possible British help for the Soviets would have been blocked. Following long negotiations, Hitler achieved what he wanted and a Turco-German neutrality pact was signed on 18 June 1941. Moreover, Turkey also agreed to supply Germany with chromium, a critical raw material used in weaponry manufacture, for three consecutive years. Even after this deal on neutrality, Hitler continued to attach special importance to potential Turkish cooperation on various other matters.

The attitude of the Turkish politicians and the public towards the Germans in those days appears to be a mixed one. Some dignitaries like Sukru Saracoglu,³⁶ Fevzi Cakmak³⁷ and Numan Menemencioglu³⁸ several times explained how Turkey was 'entirely on Germany's side' in this struggle against Bolshevism. They made it clear that

³⁵ Aydin, p. 442.

³⁶ Prime Minister from July 1942 onwards.

³⁷ The head of the Turkish armed forces.

³⁸ Secretary General of Foreign Affairs; Foreign Affairs minister from August 1943 onwards.

they expected a total defeat of the Soviet Union, which was their sincere desire.³⁹ Some journalists like Yunus Nadi of Cumhuriyet and Falih Rifki Atay of Ulus argued that Turkey had no designs on the territory or rights of any country, but that she would 'do her duty to the end' if the need arose.⁴⁰

There was also feeling in the Assembly that if it was not too late, a new opening should be looked for in the direction of Germany. Turkey, it was said, should make use of her unique strategic position in this new European balance. Kazim Karabekir maintained the need for a Turkish-German agreement in the face of a mutual Soviet danger. He said this did not mean the scrapping of the Anglo-Turkish alliance but a realistic appreciation of what other possibilities existed which could combine with it to safeguard Turkey. Another MP made this interesting comment on why Turkey had to join the war: 'Nations are like trees and the more they get trimmed, the faster they grow'.⁴¹ He apparently believed that through suffering to some extent in the beginning, Turkey would emerge as a stronger power after the war.

There was also a general feeling amongst some Turkish leaders that it was not such a bad thing if Britain were weakened. Barutcu quotes Rauf Orbay as saying that he hoped that the Allied forces in Belgium would be made prisoner.

The British will not be beaten. There is no doubt that an Empire capable of raising 45 million soldiers will gain the final victory. But the more they are weakened beforehand the better it is for us. If they win an outright victory, we are also in trouble.

³⁹ S. Calis, "Pan-Turkism and Europeanism: a note on Turkey's pro-German neutrality during the Second World War", *Central Asian Survey* 16 (1997), p. 105.

⁴⁰ Deringil, "The Preservation", p. 42.

⁴¹ Aydemir, p. 271.

Let them come to our level, where they will have to ask our views, where they will need our soldiers and our military advice. Yes, let them fall prisoner in Belgium.⁴²

Pan-Turkism (or Touranism) was scrapped by Kemal Ataturk as an ideology. Yet, the pan-Turkic emotions or the nostalgia for a united Turkic world had been stimulated by the Germans since the beginning of their attack on the Soviet Union to tempt the Turkish government to take arms on their side. At the time, there were about 40 million people of Turkish origin in the Soviet Union awaiting 'liberation' and some form of 'affiliation' with Turkey.⁴³ Turkism indeed caused a lively debate among intellectuals and some senior Turkish cadres who felt that opportunity had to be exploited.⁴⁴ The Nazis spent as much as five million gold Reichsmark to fund some of the important figures in society⁴⁵ and their activities.⁴⁶

However, such tricks did not work at all on Ismet Inonu, the national chief, who was the most important decision-maker of that time as the president of the republic. He was not in favour of such military 'adventures' abroad, mainly due to his generation's miserable experiences during the First World War.⁴⁷ Despite this, the Turkish government permitted some pan-Turkist circles to flourish, even to make contact with Germans in order to create a separate army division annexed to the German army that consisted of Turkic prisoners of war from the regions of the Caucasus and Central

⁴² Aydin, p. 427.

⁴³ Calis, p. 106.

⁴⁴ J. M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A Study of Irredentism* (London, 1981), pp. 108-30.

⁴⁵ In the two decades following the war, some of these people founded the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). In the 1970s and 1990s they were members of several coalition governments. Today, the party is believed to have the support of around ten per cent of the Turkish electorate.

⁴⁶ Aydin, p. 449.

⁴⁷ S. Deringil, *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Second World War: An 'Active' Neutrality*, (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 130-1.

Asia.⁴⁸ Arguably, such activities were tolerated in the name of not souring relations with the Nazi regime.

The effect of the wave of Turkism began to be visible in domestic politics too. Some racist policies in the economic field were inaugurated. Of all these, the *Varlık Vergisi Kanunu* (wealth tax) had the greatest repercussions. Adopted on 11 November 1942, the law was aimed at non-Muslim minorities and demanded high amounts of payment in the form of wealth tax in a very short time. Those who failed to pay their debts within the permitted time were sent to labor camps. About 21 people died in such camps.⁴⁹

The generous commercial privileges that the Ottoman Empire granted to her Jewish/Christian citizens in her heyday gradually resulted in the virtual dominance of the country's domestic and foreign trade by non-Muslims. The nineteen years that followed the proclamation of the modern Turkish republic could not erode their control.⁵⁰ With the outside world being so preoccupied with the Second World War, circumstances permitted the government to work on the 'Turkification' of the Turkish economy.

Overall, Turkey can arguably be considered as having leaned 'slightly more' towards Germany than Britain-US in this area.

4. (1943-1945): Seeing light at the end of the tunnel

The German retreat following the battle of Stalingrad in November 1942 was a turning point for German advances in Europe. From that moment onwards, the Anglo-American front came up with the idea of launching a Balkan invasion through Turkey

⁴⁸ For example, Germans invited some leading figures like Huri Pasha, the brother of Enver Pasha, and Generals Erkilet and Erden, to Berlin.

⁴⁹ A. Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Turklestirme' Politikarlari*, (Istanbul, 2000), p. 151.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

and thus weakening the German army with the creation of a second front in Europe. This once again increased pressure on the Inonu administration.

Throughout the war, the Allies held conferences in Casablanca (12-24 January 1942), Washington (12-26 May 1943), Quebec (2-14 August 1943), Moscow (19-30 October 1943), Cairo (22-26 November 1943; 1-6 December 1943), Tehran (28 November to 1 December 1943), Yalta (4-11 February 1945) and Potsdam (July-August 1945) to discuss their war strategies.⁵¹ During the Quebec Conference and the first conference held in Cairo, Churchill defended the view that a second front had to be opened in the Balkans through Turkish participation to the war. Nevertheless, on each occasion the view that the second front had to be opened through Normandy in Western Europe prevailed amongst the other allies.⁵²

At the preliminary talks that preceded the first Cairo Conference the Turkish side rejected the demand for British bases on her soil, arguing that this would inevitably lead to a war with Germany. Once again, the diplomats argued that Turkey did not have the adequate resources to fight a major war and reiterated demands for increased weapons supply. As part of their delaying strategy, they gave Churchill a long list of requested military machinery which could take several years to supply.⁵³

At a certain point, Churchill lost patience and warned Menemencioglu that 'unless Turkey made use of that final opportunity to side with the future victors, it would be deprived of the chance to sit at the winners' table later on and all it would end up doing

⁵¹ Aydemir, pp. 255-8.

⁵² Yet, at other stages during the war the Allied submarines used the Turkish coasts along the Aegean to attack certain German/Italian military sites in the area.

⁵³ Aydin, p. 458.

would be wandering along the corridors as a mere member of the audience'.⁵⁴ Despite these political confrontations, at the second round of the Cairo talks Inonu determined 'not to receive orders, but to have an equal say!'⁵⁵ He managed to convince Roosevelt⁵⁶ and Churchill that Turkey would indeed not be ready on time for a major operation intended to take place soon. Consensus was reached that adequate aid could not be delivered on time. The USSR's stronger position after the Battle of Stalingrad must also have contributed to this outcome. By then, the Soviets reached a position which enabled them to eliminate the Nazi forces on their territory and the last thing Stalin wanted to see was American and British soldiers on Balkan territories.⁵⁷

The Normandy invasion, which began on 6 June 1944, implied that the end of the war in the old continent was approaching. As Turkey was approaching closer to the Allies in the second half of 1944, it felt it necessary to ban pro-German Turanist activities and to take some measures to exclude those people who were known as Nazi sympathizers from official posts, in order particularly to appease the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ First, Fevzi Cakmak was forced by Inonu to resign from the post of Chief of General Staff. Numan Menemencioglu, the Foreign Affairs Minister, shared the same fate. In May 1944, the two open letters from a leading pan-Turkist, Nihal Atsiz, that accused the Saracoglu government of being corrupt, gave a leading opportunity to the government to arrest all leading figures of Turkism.⁵⁹ In parallel with this policy, the Varlik Vergisi was also cancelled on 15 March 1944 and all related penalties were written off.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁴ Armaoglu, p. 171.

⁵⁵ Aydemir, p. 262.

⁵⁶ The US joined the war on the UK's side following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

⁵⁷ Aydin, p. 463.

⁵⁸ Calis, p. 108.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Aktar, p. 153.

Americans and British started demanding that Turkey cease all commercial and diplomatic relations with the Nazi Germany. This was achieved on 2 August.

From 4 to 11 February 1945, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill met in the Crimean province of Yalta. Their main aim was to reach important decisions on the future world order. One point on which consensus was reached was that only states at war with Japan and Germany as of 1 March would be invited to the San Francisco Conference setting up the United Nations. Having also severed her links with Japan on 6 January, Turkey officially declared war on the Axis powers on 23 February. However, the only motive behind this move was merely a desire to satisfy the 'procedural formalities' to join the newly formed UN. The country remained non-belligerent until 14 August — the day when the war finally ended upon Japan's surrender.

5. A brief evaluation of the Inonu style of diplomacy during the War

As tensions in Europe heightened, Inonu determined to keep Turkey neutral in the event of war, unless the country's vital interests were clearly at stake. The Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact of August 1939 prompted Turkey to sign a treaty of mutual assistance with Britain and France in October. Hedging its bets, the government concluded a nonaggression treaty with Nazi Germany on 18 June 1941, just four days before the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union. The early military successes of the Axis forces contributed to increased pro-German sentiment, even in some official circles. However, Inonu seems never to have wavered from his position that the Axis powers could not win the war. Despite German pressure, Turkey at no time permitted the passage of Axis troops, ships, or aircraft through or over Turkey and its waters, and the

Montreux Convention was scrupulously enforced in the straits. Turkey broke diplomatic relations with Hitler's government in August 1944, and, in February 1945, declared war on Germany, a necessary precondition for participation in the Conference on International Organization, held in San Francisco in April 1945, from which the United Nations emerged. Turkey thereby became one of the fifty-one original members of the world organization.

As a result of President Inonu's skilful diplomacy that exploited the continually changing balances of power during the war, Turkey survived a disaster that killed tens of millions of people worldwide without loss of a single citizen. This was even though many of her neighbors were under enemy occupation. In spite of this fact, there were many who disapproved of his stand. Some of his opponents accused him of 'having killed the nation's manhood through staying neutral in the war'.⁶¹ At one of his village tours, he was approached by a mother who angrily criticized him for the terrible state of the economy that forced her to pay five liras for her daughter's milk. His reply was: 'But I haven't left her fatherless ...'.

Still, Turkey felt politically isolated at the end of the war. When Stalin issued an ultimatum demanding several bases along the Straits as well as the return of certain provinces in eastern Turkey, Britain and the US did not offer any form of help or support for a while. By 1947, it became certain that the new world order would be a bi-polar one, with the 'capitalist' USA the 'communist' USSR competing for world leadership. Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy and could no longer provide Turkey with monetary aid. The power vacuum was finally filled by the US, which, under the Truman Doctrine, started offering monetary and military aid to avert the risk of Turkey falling under

⁶¹ Aydemir, p. 269.

communist control. This paved the way for Turkish membership of NATO in 1952. Following these developments Turkey lost the autonomy in the field of foreign policy that it had enjoyed since the foundation of the modern republic. Turkey could no longer avoid the total domination of any one power over her by using one rival power against another. The country was firmly attached to the western camp and came within the American sphere of influence.⁶²

As expected, Turkey did not get any major 'reward' after the war.⁶³ The Aegean islands previously under Italian control were returned to Greece as 'war compensation'. This significantly tilted the balance of power in the Aegean against Turkey and planted the seeds of renewed Greco-Turkish enmity — something that had been dormant after the peace treaty signed in Lausanne. Besides, Turkey lost the chance to have an increased bargaining power when the conditions leading to the independence of Cyprus issue was negotiated with Britain a decade later. The Western-imposed solution did not work and led to a civil war between the local Turks and the Greeks. The Cyprus issue caused Turkey to come to brink of war with Greece in the 1960's and 1970's and to this date awaits resolution. The general belief is that the Allied military protection offered was not sufficient for Turkey to stand up to Germany alone. Were the potential 'rewards' worth taking the risk of becoming subject to Nazi attack and losing all the industrial achievements that took place since 1923? Were they worth the lives of possibly thousands of Turkish citizens? If Ataturk had remained president during this era could

⁶² M. A. Birand, *Demirkirat: Bir Demokrasinin Dogusu*, (Istanbul, 1991), p. 26.

⁶³ In his meeting with Churchill, fifteen days after the Pearl Harbor attack (when he most desperately needed some form of Turkish help), Stalin said that in the event of her active participation, Turkey should be offered the twelve Aegean islands held by Italy, south of Bulgaria and some parts of northern Syria.

he have secured a better deal from the Allies and still manage to remain neutral? This is something for the reader to decide in view of what has been portrayed above.