



TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE MIDDLE EAST IN 1950-1954

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the fundamental changes in the domestic political transformation and foreign policy orientations of the Republic of Turkey in the period following the Second World War. In the context of the new international system that emerged after the war, Turkey pursued an active policy aimed at being recognized as part of the European community in political, social, and cultural terms and at integrating into the Western world. In this process, the threat of the spread of communism originating from the Soviet Union became one of the key factors shaping the country's foreign policy.

By the late 1950s, new directions also began to emerge in Turkey's Middle East policy. The secret cooperation established between Turkey and Israel in 1958, known as the "Periphery Alliance," was aimed at limiting Soviet influence in the region, countering pan-Arabism and radical political movements, and strengthening relations with Western countries.

KEYWORDS: Republic of Turkey, Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes, World War II, the DP and CHP parties, the Middle East, NATO, the USA, the USSR, Ben-Gurion, the Saadabad Pact, the Baghdad Pact.

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Second World War, the Republic of Turkey, like many other countries, aimed to position itself within the newly emerging international order and to present itself as a European country in political, social, cultural, and other respects. However, it should be emphasized that another major factor behind this orientation was the growing concern over the threat posed by the spread of communism originating from the Soviet Union.

During the period under consideration, both internal political dynamics and external factors played an important role in Turkey's transition to a multi-party system after the Second World War. Deputies who broke away from the Republican People's Party (CHP), under the leadership of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes, established the Democrat Party (DP). In contrast to the existing single-party structure, the DP promoted a more liberal political agenda and emphasized a more active and outward-oriented foreign policy.

With the establishment of the Democrat Party on January 7, 1946, the Republic of Turkey entered a new political era. President İsmet İnönü initially supported the formation of the party, interpreting it both as a form of controlled opposition and as a necessary step toward a multi-party political life. However, over time, the DP rapidly strengthened its position, particularly due to the support of the press, its portrayal as a "savior" in public discourse, and various domestic political and social factors.

On the day of its establishment, Celal Bayar personally announced the creation of the party to representatives of the Turkish press. The party program defined its primary objective as

elevating the Republic of Turkey to a higher level of democracy and conducting politics based on democratic principles and thinking. While domestic policy emphasized democratic governance, the party's foreign policy vision was based on the legal equality of states and nations, the development of political, economic, and cultural cooperation, the strengthening of mutual trust and good neighborly relations, and the pursuit of a peaceful and transparent foreign policy.

A central objective of Turkish foreign policy in this period was to secure a place within the Western security system, both to obtain financial assistance and to ensure national security, particularly against the perceived Soviet threat in the region. The deterioration of the international environment pushed Turkey to seek an end to its diplomatic isolation and to explore closer cooperation with the West, especially in the field of security. Although the DP government continued the general orientation of Turkish-British cooperation and close relations with the United States, Democratic leaders had previously criticized the CHP for failing to obtain firm security guarantees from Western allies. Consequently, once in power, the DP sought more concrete and reliable security commitments.

Although new directions in Turkey's Middle East policy began to emerge after the Second World War, the most active transformation occurred following the rise to power of the Democrat Party under Menderes. During this period, Turkey abandoned the policy of neutrality that had been pursued during the Atatürk era. One of the most significant achievements of the Menderes government was Turkey's accession to NATO in 1952. After the war, Soviet territorial demands and its desire to revise the status of the Turkish Straits created serious concern in Ankara and prompted efforts to balance Soviet pressure through military cooperation with the United States. Washington, for its part, viewed Turkey as a strategically important country in the containment of communism.

In the 1950s, Turkey played a key role in the United States' strategy to counter the communist threat and prevent the spread of Soviet influence. One of the primary objectives of U.S. policy during the Cold War was to prevent Soviet penetration into the Middle East and to ensure the security and control of the region's oil resources. Turkey's geographical position enabled it to function as a bridge between the West and the Middle East, making it an essential component in the defense of the region against Soviet expansion. The establishment of American military bases in Turkey further strengthened its importance as a strategic ally.

Perceiving the Soviet Union as its principal threat in the Middle East, the Menderes government strongly supported the Western anti-communist containment strategy. Turkey demonstrated its commitment by joining not only NATO but also regional security arrangements such as the Balkan Pact and the Baghdad Pact. As a result, Turkey moved away from its earlier neutrality and became an active participant in the Cold War, playing an important role with the support of the United States.

In 1958, a highly secret agreement known as the "Periphery Pact" was concluded between Turkey and Israel. Although the idea dated back to the early years following the establishment of Israel, it was implemented approximately a decade later. The alliance had three main objectives: forming cooperation among non-Arab states surrounding the Arab world, breaking the isolation imposed on Israel by Arab countries, establishing a new balance of power and stability in the region, and strengthening relations with the West, particularly the United States.

Initially, Turkey was cautious about developing closer relations with Israel, fearing that such cooperation might undermine the Baghdad Pact. Menderes even requested that Israel remain patient and keep existing economic contacts confidential. However, developments such as Iraq's opposition to Turkey on the Cyprus issue at the United Nations, the establishment of the United Arab Republic in 1958, and the Iraqi coup of the same year led Ankara to reassess its position. A highly confidential meeting between Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Adnan Menderes in Ankara on August 29, 1958, laid the foundation for closer bilateral cooperation. Subsequent contacts between officials of the two countries remained secret and developed primarily in the political, economic, and military spheres. Shared interests included countering Soviet expansion, limiting pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, and combating terrorism. These relations continued even after the 1960 military coup, as the administration of General Cemal Gürsel maintained and, in some respects, strengthened ties with Israel.

It should be noted that the principles of "national independence" and "national security" emphasized by Atatürk gradually evolved, under Cold War conditions, into a security policy closely aligned with the United States. Suspicious of Soviet efforts to expand influence in the Middle East, the Menderes government sought to prevent the spread of the "Red threat" by promoting a regional collective security system and by persuading both NATO members and neighboring states to support this objective.

Menderes frequently emphasized Turkey's geopolitical importance and the strategic significance of the Middle East for ensuring security, peace, and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, he sought to develop relations with regional states and to play a leading role, particularly in addressing regional conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli issue.

Although the Soviet Union had initially recognized Israel, in the 1950s it altered its strategy, suspended diplomatic relations, and began to support Arab states. Meanwhile, Turkey attempted to improve its relations with Arab countries through diplomatic initiatives. Despite President Celal Bayar's statement in 1950 regarding the revival of the Saadabad Pact, Turkey also had to manage tensions arising from its participation in the Korean War under UN command, which had been opposed by several Arab states.

Believing that Turkish and American interests largely coincided, especially in the Middle East, Menderes sought to encourage other regional countries to integrate into the Western security framework. He also aimed to assume a leadership role among newly emerging Arab states and to establish Turkey as a key regional actor. However, a major obstacle was the negative perception among Arab governments and the Arab press regarding Turkey's recognition of Israel.

At a time when reports were circulating in the Arab media alleging a military alliance between Turkey and Israel and portraying Turkey as hostile to Arab interests, Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü stated in a conversation with an American adviser at the U.S. Embassy that improving relations with Arab states had been a priority since the formation of the first DP government. He emphasized that Turkey needed not only to maintain correct relations but also to build sincere and trustworthy partnerships with its neighbors. At the same time, he acknowledged the difficulty of persuading Arab states to cooperate with the West and stressed the importance of establishing closer relations with Egypt as a first step toward regional adjustment.

Overall, Menderes demonstrated strong commitment to the creation of a broad security belt, stretching from the Atlantic to Pakistan, within the framework of the U.S.-led containment

strategy. Through this policy, Turkey sought to strengthen its strategic position and play a central role in the Western security architecture in the Middle East.

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