

# The US-Turkey Relationship During the Cold War: Alliance and Issues

Gokhan Ozkan <sup>+</sup>

Yalova University, Turkey

**Abstract.** After the Second World War, the US-Turkey relationship expanded to encompass a broad range of political, economic and security issues. After Turkey was admitted as a full member of the NATO, the US and Turkey entered into a strategic alliance. In this study, the US-Turkey relations during the Cold War will be examined. Issues of contention in this relationship will be analyzed and effect of these issues on Turkish foreign policy will be evaluated. To this end, the US's policy to shift NATO's defense strategy from massive retaliation strategy to flexible response strategy in spite of opposition of some NATO allies including Turkey will be evaluated. The US's secret agreement with the Soviet Union to withdraw Jupiter missiles in Turkey during the Cuba Crisis in spite of Turkey's reservations will be investigated. Effect of these issues on Turkish foreign policy will be analyzed. After the Second World War, Turkey became a part of the Western Bloc. Nonetheless, Turkey, which was a middle-power country, disagreed with the US over some issues. As a consequence, while continuing to be a part of the Western Bloc, Turkey tried to follow a more balanced and multi-dimensional foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Cold War, USA, Turkish foreign policy, NATO, Cuba crisis

## 1. Introduction

The Turkish-American relationship began as a trade relationship in North Africa in late 18th century. The Friendship and Trade Treaty signed between the Ottoman Empire and the United States in 1830 was the first treaty between two states. Relations between two states were relatively limited during the 19th and 20th century. Diplomatic relations were cut after the US declared war to Germany during the First World War. Relations between the US and the Republic of Turkey were established again in 1927. [1]

Turkey was politically close to a group of states opposing Germany before the Second World War. [2] After the Soviet Union's demands related with the military control of the Bosphorus and Dardanel Straits in 1945, relationship between the Soviet Union and Turkey deteriorated. The Soviet Union leader Krushchev, during a speech in 1955, admitted that inappropriate declarations of the Soviet officials in 1945 had weakened Turkish-Russian relations. [3] The "Aron Paradigm", according to which it is not realistic and possible for a middle-power country like Turkey to conduct foreign policy independent from the Blocs in a bipolar international system especially if the geostrategic location of that country is very important for the Blocs, became applicable to Turkey's situation in the post-Second World War era. [4] Relationship between Turkey and the US, which had emerged as the other superpower of the international system, began to develop in a new direction.

The US, after conflict of interests between herself and the Soviet Union became apparent during the Potsdam Conference, increased her support to Turkey against Soviet Union's demands about the Straits. After the anti-West communist revolt began to threaten pro-West regime in Greece and after the Soviet Union did not withdraw its troops from Iran, US's suspicions about Soviet Union's intentions increased. The US perceived these actions as Soviet Union's efforts to increase her influence in these regions. As a consequence, the US's support to Turkey increased. [5] Increasing influence of the Soviet Union over the Eastern European countries multiplied worries of the US government. At the Moscow Conference in December 1945, the US President Truman criticized foreign policy of the Soviet Union in Bulgaria and Romania and said that the Soviet Union had intentions to invade Turkey and control the Bosphorus and Dardanel Straits. He also said that he was wary of babying the Soviets. [6] Taking into account the geostrategic location of Turkey, the US increased its support to Turkey's positions on the Straits issue further.

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<sup>+</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: +902268115038.  
E-mail address: ozkan.gkhn@gmail.com

In August 1946, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US concluded that Turkey was the most important factor in the East Mediterranean and the Middle East and the US should give military aid and support to repel the Soviet Union in these regions. [7]

The Truman Doctrine was a turning point for the Turkish-American relationship. According to Leffler, the American planners were already busy with analyzing Turkey even before declaration of the Truman Doctrine because of potential benefit of Turkey in a war against the Soviet Union. [8] After Turkey's military support in the Korean War and after Turkey was admitted as a full member of the NATO, the relationship between the two countries reached the level of strategic partnership. According to the analysis of an American public affairs official in Ankara in 1954, Turkey was maybe the most anti-Communist country in the world even if she did not like to be called anti-Communist by foreigners. [9] Turkey, as a result of its anti-Communist stance and as a result of its geostrategic importance as a flank country of the NATO, became one of the most important countries for the US in the region.

The Turkish-American relationship continued to be strategically important during the Cold War. Nonetheless, in spite of intensive cooperation in military and political dimensions, conflict of interests and different points of view over some issues tightened relations. The US's policy to shift defense strategy of the NATO from massive retaliation to flexible response in spite of the opposition of NATO allies including Turkey was one of the issues of contention between two countries. The US's secret agreement with the Soviet Union to withdraw Jupiter missiles in Turkey without consulting Turkey in return for withdrawal of missiles in Cuba was another issue that created tensions in Turkish-American relations.

In this study, relationship between the US and Turkey during the Cold War will be analyzed. Issues of contention between two countries and consequences of these issues on Turkish foreign policy will be evaluated. The article proceeds in the following manner. In the first section, US's policy to shift NATO's defense strategy from massive retaliation to flexible response in spite of the opposition of its NATO allies and its impact on the Turkish-American relations will be evaluated. In the second section, impact of the Cuba crisis on Turkish-American relations will be investigated.

## **2. The Shift of NATO's Massive Retaliation Strategy to Flexible Response Strategy and its Impact on Turkish-American Relations**

One of the issues that affected Turkish-American relations negatively during the Cold War was the shift of NATO's defense strategy from massive retaliation strategy, which was adopted in 1954, to flexible response strategy. According to flexible response strategy, the Alliance, in case one of the member countries was attacked militarily, would start diplomatic efforts and initially counter this attack with conventional weapons. If diplomatic efforts and conventional weapons can not stop the conflict, tactical nuclear weapons would be considered. In case tactical nuclear weapons can also not stop the conflict, strategic nuclear weapons would be considered. [10] The flexible response strategy was opposed by many Allied countries including Turkey since it could lead to destruction of flank countries. As a result of the shift of NATO's defense strategy, France withdrew from the military wing of the NATO in 1966. Turkey was among the countries that opposed most.

The US's insistence to shift NATO's strategy was because of a strategic change in Soviet Union's technological and military capabilities. The Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik to orbit the Earth in 1957. This meant that the Soviet Union had gained the technological capacity to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles. The US strategists immediately started to reevaluate massive retaliation strategy since it was understood that the Soviet Union, which had nuclear weapons, had now gained the capacity to attack the US soil with intercontinental ballistic missiles. The US sought new strategies to intervene crises in periphery countries and to prevent escalation of a crisis in a periphery country to a crisis between two superpowers. As a result, containment policy was changed. Strategies such as "flexible response", "détente", "Second Cold War" and "status quo plus" were adopted. [11]

In 1962, the Kennedy government officially adopted the Flexible Response Doctrine. Flexible Response Doctrine created security problems for many NATO member countries including Turkey. The US's insistence on the Flexible Response Doctrine, according to which use of nuclear weapons was seen as a last

resort, made US's intention to defend NATO member countries questionable. Turkey strongly opposed the new doctrine since Turkey was one of the flank countries that would suffer most in case of a conventional attack. Meanwhile, the new doctrine guaranteed that the US soil would not be under threat during regional crises. [12]

Uncertainty with regards to Turkey's defense in case it was attacked by the Soviet Union created security concerns in Turkey and dependability of NATO became questionable. Decision to use nuclear weapons to counter a military attack from the Soviet Union would be given by the US. This further increased uncertainties in Turkey's security perceptions. According to the new doctrine, a conventional attack from the Soviet Union to Turkey could be evaluated as a regional conflict. In that case, Turkey might have to fight the Soviet Union without NATO's support and could have suffered enormous damage.

The adoption of the flexible response doctrine by the NATO affected Turkey's security negatively. The US's insistence to shift NATO's defense strategy in spite of the opposition of NATO allies including Turkey forced Turkey to reevaluate its national security priorities and its relations with the US.

### **3. The Cuba Crisis and its Implications for the Turkish-American Relations**

Another issue that created tension between Turkey and the US during the Cold War was the Cuba Crisis in 1962. The US government had received intelligence that the Soviet Union was in the process of installing intermediate-range ballistic missiles that could hit the US in Fidel Castro's Cuba. She imposed a naval blockade around Cuba to stop ships that were carrying missile parts to Cuba. This increased tensions between the US and Soviet Union. The Soviet Union demanded withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles in Turkey in return for the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba. [13] The US accepted to stop naval blockade if missile launchers are removed. The US government used a positive tone about the Jupiter missiles in Turkey even if it did not accept officially.

The US had offered Turkey to withdraw the Jupiter missiles before the Cuba Crisis but Turkey had not accepted this offer. The US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk had talked with his counterpart, Selim Sarper in April 1961 about this issue. Sarper had told him that this would be embarrassing for the Turkish government since decision to finance the Jupiter missiles had just been taken in the Turkish parliament. Two sides had agreed that it was impossible to withdraw the Jupiter missiles until 1963 Spring when the Polaris submarines would be deployed. [14] The Jupiter missiles were turned over to Turkey on October 22, 1962. On the same day, the US demanded that the Soviet Union withdraw SS-4 missiles in Cuba. [15]

When Turkish government learned Soviet Union's offer about the Jupiter missiles during the Cuba Crisis, she argued that the issue should be discussed in NATO and handled within the context of non-proliferation. Turkey also argued that it was wrong to compare the missiles in Cuba with the Jupiter missiles since the missiles in Cuba had the capacity to change the status quo because of their offensive capacities while the Jupiter missiles were defensive. [16]

The US government approached the Soviet Union's demand to withdraw the Jupiter missiles positively even if it did not accept it officially. It declared that no decision would be taken without Turkey's approval. Meanwhile, secret negotiations between the Soviet Union and the US continued.

After negotiations, the Soviet Union declared that missiles in Cuba would be removed. Jupiter missiles were not mentioned. According to allegations; brother of the US President, the US Attorney General, Robert Kennedy had negotiated with the Soviet Union Ambassador to Washington and had offered him to withdraw the Jupiter missiles after two countries agreed on the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba. [17] The US had given this concession on condition that no public declaration would be made about this agreement by Soviet officials. [18] The National Security Advisor of the US President, McGeorge Bundy later told in his memoirs that they had misled their allies for Western Bloc's security. [19]

The US officials later said that handling of the Cuba Crisis could be a textbook example of the flexible response strategy. [20] Increasing pressure on the enemy stage by stage by using political, economic, military, physiological and diplomatic power was evaluated as a method that could be used in other issues. [21]

The Jupiter missiles in Turkey were removed in April 1963. Turkey was told that the Jupiter missiles would be substituted with the Polaris submarines since the missiles had become old-fashioned. The Soviet Embassy leaked the agreement between the US and the Soviet Union in 1964. The Turkish and the American governments denied the agreement. Nonetheless, the agreement was officially confirmed after 25 years and became the story of a Hollywood movie, "Thirteen Days". [22]

Even if the agreement was officially denied by the American and Turkish governments, this incident caused a crisis of confidence between two countries. Jupiter missiles and flexible response doctrine issues and the US's policies about these issues led the Turkish state to re-evaluate its foreign and security policies. Turkey tried to follow a more balanced and multi-directional foreign policy.

#### 4. Conclusion

At the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences in 1945, the US and the Soviet Union disagreed over many issues about the post-war international order. Difference of opinions between the two superpowers widened after developments in Iran, Turkey and Germany, which were signalling the coming of a bipolar international system. In this international political conjuncture, it was impossible for middle powers like Turkey to follow a balanced policy.

Turkey became a part of the Western Bloc in the bipolar international system since she was worried to be encircled by the Soviet Union and its satellites in the Balkans and the Caucasia. Relations between Turkey and the US began to develop in a new direction after the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. The relations reached the strategic level after Turkey was accepted as a full member of the NATO.

Even if relationship between two countries continued to be strategic partnership during the Cold War, two countries disagreed over many issues. Shift of the defense strategy of the NATO from massive retaliation strategy to flexible response strategy in spite of the opposition of many NATO allies including Turkey and removal of the Jupiter missiles as a result of secret negotiations between the Soviet Union and the US in spite of Turkey's reservations were among the issues that created tension in relations between the US and Turkey. After these developments, Turkey re-evaluated its foreign and security policies and tried to follow a more balanced and multi-directional foreign policy.

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