

ety, places it in a broader context, and is thereby able to offer carefully grounded and plausible motives for the actions of both individuals and groups. The author is to be

congratulated on a scholarly and rigorously researched contribution.

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Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union, 1940-45: Strategy, Diplomacy and Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean

By *Nicholas Tamkin*

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Turkey, due to its geopolitical position, was subject to political and military pressures by the Great Powers during and immediately after World War Two. During the war, the Great Powers exerted substantial pressures on Turkey to obtain its compliance in operating the Straits policy in accordance with their own strategic interests. This situation led to collaboration and competition among the Great Powers. In fact, the rivalry and collaboration of the Great Powers in the eastern Mediterranean during these periods, and the interaction of British, Soviet and American policies with those of regional states, has been examined by a number of Turkish and foreign researchers in recent years. Nicholas Tamkin is one of these authors and he has meticulously trawled through British archives and other published and unpublished sources available in Britain to elucidate Turkey's role in British strategy and diplomacy during World War Two. He makes a significant contribution on the formulation of British foreign policy and wartime strategy towards Turkey with a special emphasis given on Turkey's place in the uneven relationship between Britain and the Soviet Union.

Tamkin starts with a thesis stating that British policy towards Turkey during

World War Two was misapprehended and misguided as Turkey's belligerency against Germany would only have been a burden on the Allied side and would not bring much benefit to them due to Turkey's military weakness and inadequate preparedness. The author skillfully demonstrates the ups and downs which took place in the trilateral relationship of Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union with well organized and outlined arguments in the nine chapters. Tamkin is perhaps too skillful, which leads to the loss of the complexities and ambiguities that characterized the relationships among these powers.

It is remarkable that throughout his book the author reveals the pragmatic attitude of Britain towards Turkey which at many times was ambiguous and as a result damaged Anglo-Turkish relations. One of the striking examples which explains this situation well occurred at a time when London to some extent recognized Ankara's fears of Moscow before the start of operation 'Barbarossa' and then the critical approach taken by Britain on the same Turkish fears after the German invasion of the USSR as London became an ally of Moscow and wanted to reconcile the sharp differences between Turkey and the

Soviet Union at the expense of Turkey (pp. 19-31).

It is within this general framework that the author presents four key stages in exploring Turkey's role in British wartime and post-war strategy: the first is in the Balkans in the winter of 1940-41; the second is on the 'Northern Front' in 1941-42; the third is in the Mediterranean theatre during 1943; and the fourth stage deals with Turkey's role in British post-war planning starting from late 1943 onwards. Turkey's role is scrutinized through different viewpoints incorporating the views of different departments and key figures such as Prime Minister Churchill, Anthony Eden and other prominent officials in the Foreign Office (FO), and the Chiefs of Staff (COS).

The inconsistent attitude often shown towards Turkey's role in the British war effort is clearly demonstrated in the book as the British War Cabinet and COS in late 1940s began to ask for Turkey's belligerency in the belief that the German military build-up in the Balkans not only targeted the Balkan states but also Turkey when in fact Berlin was making preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union. This view was strongly supported by Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden as well. A few months earlier, however, both the COS and FO had taken a view that Turkey's neutrality was far more beneficial to Britain than its entry into the war. The worst part was the fact that Britain wanted to get Turkey on its side without providing for any effective assistance as Britain was itself in an immense shortage of man and military equipment in the Middle Eastern front.

Confusion about British objectives in Turkey became greater in the British War Cabinet when discussions on the Turkish issue brought about a clash of views

between the two key departments from late 1940s onwards. While the British COS, with an idea of establishing a Balkan front, urged for Turkey's participation in the war, and was endorsed by Churchill, the FO realistically realized that Turkey's neutrality constituted a barrier to Germany and it could better assist Britain through diplomatic channels which sought a political cooperation rather than military action in the Balkans against the Axis powers.

Towards the end of April 1941, when the Balkans fell under Nazi occupation, Turkey then began to be considered in the British war strategy within the context of the 'Northern Front' of the Middle Eastern theatre. This strategy was based on the idea that Britain could rely on Turkey's resistance to protect the Middle East in case the Soviet Union collapsed in the Caucasus (the Northern Front) against Germany. As a result Britain had retreated to a policy which acknowledged the position of Turkey's neutrality as the latter was began to be thought of as a natural bulwark to the German advance towards the Middle East.

This strategy, however, was bound to change, as often occurred, due to Allied military achievements in North Africa and the stagnation of the German drive in the Caucasus during late 1942. These crucial successes led Churchill to draw up a new strategy which contemplated a strike against the German flank in the eastern Mediterranean. The realization of this strategy was based on the attainment of Turkey's entry into the war. To gain this objective Churchill, with the support of COS, took the Turkish matter into his own hands despite the opposition shown by the War Cabinet and the FO officials. The British COS, unlike Churchill, however, did not see much benefit in Turkey's belligerency without providing for

adequate military assistance. They believed that “the organizational and communicational weaknesses might make Turkish belligerency counterproductive” (p. 123). Moreover, Anglo-American war plans for the invasion of north-western France in 1944 diverted a great deal of the available British military resources to that theatre and this thus extremely limited the British war effort in the eastern Mediterranean. As a result Britain began to cut off the military supplies to Turkey promised by Churchill during the Adana Conference in January 1943. The British inconsistent attitude towards Turkey was thus the main reason which eventually brought about the near collapse in Anglo-Turkish relations during 1944.

I would, however, quarrel with Tamkin about who was responsible for the break down in relations between Turkey and Britain and how their relationship was put back on track after 1944. While the major responsibility for the aggravation of relationships lies with Britain, Turkey also had its share as well. Britain’s inability to provide adequate military equipment for Turkey and İnönü’s failure to take full control of foreign affairs against the pro-German party in Turkey were the main reasons for Turkey’s not taking part in the war in time. The available Turkish and German documents point to the existence of strong pro-German elements in Turkey and the Turkish president was only able to take full control of the events after the forced resignations of Numan Menemenciöđlü, the foreign minister of Turkey, and the old Marshall Fevzi Çakmak, chief of the Turkish general staff, in 1944.

It was for this reason that Turkey was able make a late request to Britain to join the war towards the end of January 1945,

proposing either to fight on the Italian front or to clear up the Germans from the Aegean theatre. The British COS, despite Churchill’s strong opposition however, rejected the Turkish request on the grounds that the employment of Turkish forces could delay Allied war plans and it would entail American approval, and hence there was not enough time. The Turkish request, therefore, was dropped. Regarding this point Tamkin inevitably reaches a wrong conclusion about Turkey’s position related to the war (p. 162) when he readily accepts the findings of the existing literature and fails to consult my work on this issue since I am the first researcher to bring to light this issue.

Failure to consult available Turkish sources is the main weakness in Tamkin’s work. The use of intercepted SIGINT documents, as the author asserts, in no way takes the place of Turkish documents about the issues related to Turkey’s war-time strategy and foreign policy. This is particularly striking when Tamkin, to his surprise, asks why Turkey initially kept Britain dark about the negotiations regarding the renewal of its alliance with the Soviet Union (pp. 176-177). The reason was obvious: It was because Turkey was suspicious of British intentions. When the Turks realized that they could not come to terms with the Soviet Union alone did they have to call for British advice.

Despite these shortcomings this work is an impressive and valuable contribution to our understanding of the trilateral relationships between Britain, Turkey and the Soviet Union during World War Two, an era which represented one of the most complex periods of modern history.

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