MANAGING THE TRANSITION FROM PAX BRITANNICA TO PAX AMERICANA: TURKEY’S RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN AND THE US IN A TURBULENT ERA (1929-1947)

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Abstract: In analyzing Turkey’s relations with Great Britain and the US in a period of drastic change (1929-1947), this article argues that the origins of the shift in the orientation of Turkish foreign policy from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana not only affected the perceptions and strategies of relevant powers, but also entailed a dynamic interactive process. It asserts that the transition featured aspects of significant change, as well as continuity for the region. It demonstrates that while attempting to bandwagon with the relatively stronger naval, military and economic partner, Turkey also endeavored to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy at various stages of this transition.

Keywords: Turkish foreign policy; Pax Britannica; Pax Americana; World War II; Truman Doctrine

The period from World War One (WWI) to the end of World War Two (WWII) could be defined as a transitional era, one of movement away from the path of global integration championed by Great Britain to the corporate system favored by the United States (US). However, the lack of linear continuity between the decline of the imperial system and the rise of a corporate order1 indicates that American hegemony was not so easily consolidated. Even though the US initiated a process of extending control overseas, it temporarily withdrew from that process as a result of the effects of the World Economic Crisis in the 1930s and of WWII, until its more active engagement in the early Cold War era.

This article analyses how Turkey, operating within the context of emerging space for new opportunities and relatively autonomous policies for regional powers, tried to manage the complex dynamics of the transition from Pax Britannica to PaxAmericana, a process that involved crucial issues relating to resilience and change. While a general tendency has been to address relations in a bilateral fashion, our triangular perspective provides valuable insights into strategic adjustments made in the transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana. Moreover, while the primary emphasis of the article is on foreign policy dynamics, the relevant political and social factors are also examined in terms of domestic and foreign policy linkages. With its in-depth analysis of Turkish foreign policy based on archival sources and pertinent private papers, our study argues that the shift not only shaped the perceptions and strategies of the powers in question, but also involved a much more complex and dynamic interactive process than is generally recognized during the period of radical change from the World Economic Crisis to the Truman Doctrine (1929-1947). While a number of studies have focused on the

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Cold War context, this significant prelude to it has been rather neglected. This period is significant, because it provides us with invaluable insights pertaining to the interaction of two major powers at a time of drastic change and turmoil and examines Turkey’s adaptation as a critical regional actor in the emerging new world order.

Britain, in the 19th century, established “a global empire of free trade enforced by a Royal Navy presence in all oceans and both hemispheres.” According to Arnold J. Toynbee, Pax Britannica was “based partly on naval power and partly on money power.” Moreover, the organization of the system left production to indigenous producers as long as regional markets stayed open to British markets, and rested, therefore, on “the capacity of the colonial state to extract and transfer surpluses.” During the 20 years of crisis (1919-1939), the working hypothesis of an international order created by a superior power was destroyed because of the diminished strength of the British fleet, the breaking down of free trade, and the ability of the London market to enforce a single currency standard over only a limited area. Eric Hobsbawn argues that not only did the traditional economy of Britain cease to grow, but it contracted. In 1913, “twelve million tons of British shipping had sailed the seas, in 1938 there was rather less than eleven million.” In other words, “the sun went below the horizon, although the British leaders still endeavoured to prove that the sun never set on British territories or spheres of influence.” This era, in fact, opened the way for a rivalry between imperial and corporate means of organizing production and power. According to Michael Geyer, corporate forms of control were characterized by tight integration of global systems of finance, production and exchange, while at the political level the US aimed to defend global stability through its “projections of military power.”

In the aftermath of WWII, the rise of Pax Americana was based partly on the direct influence of US naval ascendancy, but it also hinged on a web of international institutions backed by US diplomacy and financing. The US invested heavily in programs such as the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan while it economically fortified the defense ties that ultimately paved the way for a bipolar international system. Pax Americana owed its strength to emerging multilateral institutions geared towards maintaining US hegemony within the international system. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and, to a much lesser extent, the South East Treaty Organization (SEATO) were particularly essential for the consolidation of US power in an increasingly polarized world. As the United Nations (UN) replaced the League of Nations as the main multilateral platform of international affairs, a corresponding shift from the old secret diplomacy to a new, open one also occurred.

Some scholars believe that Pax Britannica and Pax Americana were myths, as British and American hegemonies were defined in a regional and issue-specific rather than general manner. Hence, “there has been no global, system-wide hegemon during the past centuries.” Others argue that the European-North-Atlantic world was set up “as an ever more distinct region only in the process of expansion and as a result of the projection of power.” In fact, most debates on imperialism focus on “the conversion of an already centred process of global integration into a specific liberal world order” that consisted of autonomous regions as well. In these regions, forces that were attempting to situate themselves in the new global order simultaneously undertook to challenge both corporate and imperial orders.

While at various stages of this transition Turkey was attempting to bandwagon with its relatively stronger naval, military and economic partner, opportunities also arose for it to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy than would have been possible in the ensuing bipolar area, with its more clearly defined and rigid dynamics. The decade of 1929-1939 was indeed
exceptional for Turkey as it attempted to develop autonomous policies from those of the great powers. And following WWII, after the effects of Pax Americana had become more widespread, Turkey strove to be integrated into the new world order. Hence, the article focuses on Turkish perceptions and policymaking as its leaders assessed how to maintain and develop autonomy vis-à-vis Britain, particularly as Turkey concomitantly moved from a reticent alliance with that country to a more enthusiastic one with the US.

From Challenge to Accommodation

Adapting to the Political and Economic Terrain in the Post-War Context

In the post-war context, while Britain was pursuing extensive political and territorial interests in the former Ottoman territories in particular, the activities of the US were confined primarily to the missionary and economic spheres. As opposed to the very active engagement of Britain in shaping the complex web of relations in a highly volatile region, the US position remained politically aloof, yet engaged commercially.

Regarding Turkish perceptions and policymaking, Turkey on the one hand attempted to challenge European and particularly British moves to reshape the post-war Middle East through a successful War of Independence. On the other hand, Turkish nationalist leaders hoped to break away from the Ottoman past by refraining from undertaking adventurous policies in neighboring territories. On the domestic scene, under the single-party rule led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) a dramatic series of modernizing reforms was initiated, touching on all facets of life in the new Republic of Turkey that had been established in 1923. The broad range of these secularizing and modernizing reforms, including the abolishment of the Caliphate and Shari ’a law, incorporation of the Swiss civil code,14 the alphabet reform and the enhancement of the legal and political rights of women, stressed Turkey’s modernizing identity in the domestic realm. Hence, the leaders of Turkey undertook the arduous task of reshaping the national identity of the citizens of a truncated empire. Consequently, in terms of domestic and foreign policies, they placed significant emphasis on Turkish nationalism and a break with the Ottoman past.

Turkish nationalists had already started to challenge Pax Britannica in 1919, when they began their fight against the restrictions the Allies imposed on the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in WWI. Following the War of Independence (1919-1922), Turkish nationalists signed the Lausanne Treaty with the Allies in 1923, and this consisted of a revision of the post-war settlement. While the Lausanne Conference was being held, Turkish leaders organized an economic congress in İzmir, with the intention of showing their unified desire to establish a national economy that would make Turkey completely sovereign. In fact, the İzmir Congress reflected the dilemmas of the Turkish leadership in terms of the economic policies of Turkey in the 1920s. On the one hand, the Congress supported measures such as protectionist tariff policies and the nationalization of foreign trade, while on the other hand, it hoped the country would become integrated into the liberal economic order by welcoming foreign capital.15

During the Lausanne Conference, although the Allies recognized the territorial integrity of Turkey, the British did not want to offer any concessions on Mosul and the Straits. These issues provide good examples of the British desire to maintain its sphere of influence
and economic interests in the Middle East through its naval superiority. The Mosul issue manifested the growing British interest in the oil-rich region of Iraq. This specific issue was resolved to Britain’s advantage in 1925 when the League of Nations decided to give Mosul to Iraq (a British mandate); however, the British interest in the region’s oil actually dates back to an earlier period. Eleven days before the outbreak of the WWI, the British government confiscated all shares of the Anglo-Persian oil company, an act closely related to the programmes designed to make the Royal Navy run on oil, which were developed by the Admiralty under Churchill from 1912 to 1914.16

Britain also rejected Turkey’s demand for control over the Straits at the 1923 Conference in Lausanne. In fact, at the Washington Conference in 1921-1922, Britain had already accepted naval parity with the US for the first time, an early indication of a transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana and the shaping of a new international naval order.17 Turkey did not even reply to the invitation to attend the Washington Conference because of its concern that “such arrangements might compromise its ability to acquire means of defence.”18 In the course of a year, the Lausanne Treaty, by putting the Straits under the control of an international commission, justified Turkey’s concern for its security on the one hand, and on the other hand it consolidated British naval supremacy in the region.

From 1919 to 1927, no official diplomatic ties existed between Turkey and the US because it was only in 1927 that the US recognized the new Turkish Republic. With the lack of an official framework, Turkey-US relations remained based on protestant missionary activity and US commercial interests in Anatolia. The missionaries had a dual legacy in terms of bilateral relations. While they contributed to the emergence of a cultural basis for Turkish-US relations through their educational and philanthropic activities,19 some missionaries perpetuated the image of the “Terrible Turk,” thereby hindering bilateral relations. To counter the negative influences, the US expanded its economic ties with Turkey.20

After the Turkish Republic was established, Admiral M. Bristol, the US High Commissioner to Turkey, strove via the Open Door policy to expand US trade in Anatolia. Given that the US and Turkey had never officially declared war on each other, on August 6, 1923 in Lausanne they signed a separate bilateral treaty, the General Treaty between the United States of America and Turkey and an Extradition Treaty.21 When the Senate delayed discussion of this treaty and ultimately refused to ratify it in January 1927, in February of that year Bristol worked out a modus vivendi between Washington and Ankara.22 This prudent diplomatic move enabled the re-establishment of official relations and the enhancement of commercial ties, which paved the way for the more amicable relations of the interwar era.

A Changing International Context during the 1929 Economic Crisis: Transition Stalled or Hastened?

For Turkey, Pax Americana was at least initially more acceptable than Pax Britannica, given that the latter was tainted by an imperial legacy and territorial ambitions in the former Ottoman domains. The US was perceived as more benign. However, the 1929 Crisis interrupted the global transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana. Before the crisis, the US had begun to expand economically to the detriment of Britain, which was heavily indebted to the US. By the mid-1920s, New York had surpassed London as a source of funds invested abroad.23 and the Federal Reserve Board in Washington DC and the Federal Reserve Bank in New York became powerful enough to intervene in the international financial market. In 1929, with the New York stock market crash, the liberal economy collapsed in a crisis that led to a continuous contraction of the world economy until 1932. Industrial production declined
 sharply, with a 46 percent drop in the US and a 16 percent drop in Britain.\textsuperscript{24} The US, Europe’s largest creditor, started to recall loans and restrict new credit, endangering the fragile European prosperity of the post-war period.\textsuperscript{25}

Like other non-industrialized countries, Turkey was hit more severely by the crisis. The agricultural protectionism instituted by industrialized countries negatively affected trade in primary-producing countries like Turkey. Moreover, because of the financial crisis these countries were unable to borrow from abroad, accentuating the division between manufacturing and primary-producing countries. This widening gap in an already unequal division of labour led countries like Turkey to develop more autonomous strategies. On one side, Turkey was trying to develop independent domestic and foreign policies from the great powers, while on the other, as a new nation-state it still felt the need for economic support from an external power.

Since at this point Washington did not have any territorial or political problems with Turkey, the US provided an attractive alternative to Britain. On October 7, 1931, Şükrü Saracoğlu, former Minister of Finance, visited the US for a financial mission; however, because of the ongoing world economic crisis, he was unable to secure the anticipated loans.\textsuperscript{26} This visit indicated that, despite its lure, the US, which was still deeply affected by the 1929 crisis and maintained an isolationist foreign policy, couldn’t act as a viable alternative to Britain for Turkey. The confidential reports written during this period by the Turkish Ambassador to the US Ahmet Muhtar were entitled “Pessimism in America”, and they provide a fascinating view from a Turkish diplomat’s perspective of American society during the World Economic Crisis. While Ahmet Muhtar noted the adverse effects of increasing materialism and moral decadence,\textsuperscript{27} he still praised the US highly for its unrivalled agricultural and industrial achievements. He also admired the youth and dynamism of US society,\textsuperscript{28} which he felt could serve as a model for Turkey.

Turkey in the 1930s opted for an étatist economic policy. Instead of taking aid from the countries of Western Europe, it accepted the assistance from the Soviet Union (USSR), which was not affected by the crisis of liberalism and offered an alternative model for the development of a five-year industrial plan. In regard to foreign policy, rather than developing close ties to Britain, Turkey enhanced its relations with neighbouring countries, and Ankara took a leading role in forming the Balkan Entente in 1934. Also, supported by its Balkan neighbours, Ankara was also able to break away from its international isolation in 1932 and become a member of the League of Nations.

In point of fact, Turkey’s late membership in the League came about because of its uncongenial relations with Britain. By 1932, however, Britain had dropped its opposition to the membership of Turkey in the League. This occurred firstly because Ankara did not insist on the annexation of Mosul to Turkey; secondly, because the amelioration of Turkish-Greek relations in 1930 enhanced Turkey’s image in the eyes of Britain; and lastly, because Turkey’s geostrategic importance in the changing political atmosphere of Europe obliged Britain to improve its relations with Ankara. The British ambassador in Turkey wrote to London that “Turkey by herself is a country of little importance. But from the point of view of communications, her position is and seems likely to remain one of importance.”\textsuperscript{29}

The instability in Europe brought about by Adolf Hitler’s accession to power in Germany in 1933, and Benito Mussolini’s declaration in 1934 that Italy’s interests lay in Asia and Africa, stimulated Turkey to strive for a wider framework of cooperation, and its election to the League of Nations Council in 1934 boosted the confidence of political leaders in Ankara in their attempts to cooperate with as many countries as possible. US ambassador in Turkey
Robert P. Skinner wrote that becoming a member satisfied the Turkish government immensely, while Turkish Foreign Minister Tevfik R. Aras also stressed the Turkish intention to work for a universal arrangement in which the US could join.  

Ankara, however, was soon disappointed with the existing collective security system. In April 1935 at Stresa, the agreements between Italy, France, and Britain, which gave a free hand to Italy in Ethiopia, produced distrust toward the European powers in Ankara, where political leaders felt that the League could easily break up as a result of these agreements. Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in October justified Ankara’s fears concerning fascist aggression and at the same time facilitated the Turkish-British rapprochement. Turkey now had political as well as economic reasons to improve its relations with Britain, and in June 1935 the two countries signed a clearing agreement. Turkey also felt that it needed external economic aid as it prepared for its second five-year plan; however, the USSR, which had already helped Turkey out in its first five-year plan, was no longer economically able to continue with this assistance. The country in Europe best able to provide economic assistance to Turkey at this time was Britain. On the other hand, having signed a clearing agreement with Germany prior to that with Britain, Turkey became commercially dependent on that country, and the political leaders in Ankara wanted to balance German influence by developing closer economic relations with it.

So, as we see, the decade of 1929-1935 was quite obviously an exceptional period in the history of the Turkish Republic. With the collapse of the liberal world order, Turkey found an opportunity to develop independent policies vis-à-vis the great powers. Profiting from the power vacuum created during the transition from Pax Britannica to Pax Americana, Turkey tried to develop autonomous policies at domestic as well as external levels. At home, it applied étatist measures to overcome the repercussions of the liberal economic crisis, while abroad Ankara strove to create the impression, mainly among its Balkan neighbours, that it would not follow in the footsteps of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, as a Balkan country Turkey was able to launch many initiatives in the region, and these led to the forming of the Balkan Entente. But Turkey would soon feel the need to join the new world order which was then in the making.

Adjusting to the New Regional Dynamics and Naval Order: Turkey and Pax Britannica

From 1935 onward, the Turkish political leadership realized that the powers controlling the seas would prevail. Coextensive with that was a growing Turkish willingness to join the interwar naval order championed by Britain. In the 1920s Turkey had expressed its regional reservations concerning disarmament, having rejected any and all naval limitations in the Aegean and the Black Sea. However, in 1936 it responded positively to the British proposal laid out at the London Naval Conference and agreed to adhere to the global system of naval armament limitations. British-Soviet naval talks during the same year also facilitated British-Turkish naval cooperation.

Ankara knew that it should first convince Britain to change the demilitarized status of the Straits. In January 1936, the British Chiefs of Staff believed that the importance of Turkish friendship with Britain outweighed the disadvantages of complete remilitarization of the Straits, and highlighted the necessity of amicable relations with Turkey “to check Italian ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean, to counter the possibilities of the Soviet challenge to British interests, to create favourable conditions for the establishment of a naval base in Cyprus, and to prevent renewed German influence over Turkey and the Balkan states.” American Chargé d’Affaires H. Shaw wrote a report to Washington in March pointing out that Germany, England and the USSR were of special importance for Turkey. He reported that as
far as Turkish-British relations were concerned, “the Turks have stood squarely by the British with respect to sanctions (against Italy), the assurances to the British government in the event of Italian aggression and the several replies to Italian remonstrances.” Shaw added that the British had assured the Turks that they would not oppose the remilitarization of the Straits. When the Turkish government proposed to the League that the Straits’ status be revised, the British did not object and in July 1936 at Montreux accepted the new status of the Straits.

The Montreux Convention was the turning point in Turkish-British rapprochement. Beginning in 1936, British advisers were sent to Turkey to assist in some public projects, and the visit of King Edward VIII to Turkey notably signalled this improved climate as well. Ankara responded to this visit by dispatching the whole fleet, including the battle-cruiser Yavuz, to Malta, the first fleet sent by the Republic to a foreign port, to symbolically show Turkey’s new policy of openness towards Britain. While Turkish officials worried that the British might be involved in bilateral relations with the Italians, who favoured abrogation of the sanctions, they still believed in the need of British rearmament to defy Italian attack in the region. British Ambassador in Ankara Percy Loraine wrote London speaking of Aras’s conviction that once Britain and Turkey completed their rearmament programs, Britain and the Balkans could avert war. At that stage, notwithstanding Ankara’s desire to receive military aid from Britain, the latter did not want to commit itself to military cooperation with Turkey.

At the same time, Turkey, aware of Washington’s growing power, approached the US. The same year US ambassador in Ankara John Van A. Mac Murray reported to Washington “how the US had become a country of significant social experimentation and change and as such could hardly fail to be of intense interest to a country such as Turkey.” Ultimately, despite the adverse effects of the global economic crisis, an important economic milestone in Turkey-US relations was created when the two countries signed two commercial treaties in 1929 and 1939. US investments and economic and technical collaboration during this period foreshadowed the much broader assistance programs of the US in the aftermath of WWII.

During the interwar era, the Turkish government grew more interested in attracting US capital. Historically the US did not display any territorial and political ambitions regarding Turkey; therefore, the Turks preferred US investments and technical assistance over British ones. Moreover, they greatly admired the technical achievements and material progress of the Americans, and in these areas the US had already emerged as a potential role model. In addition to Standard Oil, big tobacco companies such as R. J. Reynolds and American Tobacco had substantial property holdings, particularly around Izmir. The Turkish Grand National Assembly had granted Ford Motor Company a concession to establish an assembly plant in a free zone in Istanbul, and by January 1930 the first Turkish Fords were on the market. Ankara was also interested in purchasing aircraft and assembling the planes in Turkey. While some US experts contributed in the major areas of education, cotton culture, public health, mineral prospecting, and general economic surveys and development, others assisted in technical areas, planning commercial air routes, conducting aerial surveys, and establishing airmail service.

On the other hand, in 1935, Washington declined Turkey’s request for US military officers to train the Turkish air force, indicating a more limited US involvement at this point.

While during this period the US maintained formal neutrality in international issues regarding Turkey unless its interests were affected directly, Washington closely followed developments bearing on the status of the Straits. Although US vessels rarely used the Straits, the US, along with the other major powers that were party to the Straits convention, still tried to preserve its passage rights. When Ankara proposed a multilateral conference to revise the Straits regime in April 1936, US Ambassador Mac Murray immediately called a meeting to
ensure the continuation of US rights regarding the freedom of commercial navigation. Ultimately, a separate Turkey-US Straits agreement was not deemed necessary, given that the Montreux Convention had granted all nations the right to free commercial navigation through the Straits. The US approach to the Convention exemplifies the tandem impact of political isolationism and economic engagement that shaped American foreign policy during this period. The US offered no objections to the tactfully timed Turkish diplomatic manoeuvre to revise the Straits regime as a means of enhancing Turkish security. Yet Washington avoided becoming a part of this process by only taking limited initiatives that would safeguard its commercial interests.

Hence, in general terms, during the turbulent era leading up to WWII, Turkey and the US maintained amicable relations shaped mainly by commercial interests. Nevertheless, from a geo-strategic point of view, in the existing unstable European climate Turkey had more to gain in the realm of security by cooperating with Britain. In the Mediterranean in the summer of 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, Turkey was clearly cooperating with Britain against Italian activities supporting Franco’s forces against the Republicans. Then, at the Nyon conference, Turkey decided to join a coalition headed by Britain that would guarantee the protection of navigation and air lanes in the Mediterranean. Again, in 1937, Ankara conveyed to Anthony Eden Turkey’s desire for its naval officers to be trained in Britain. Yet Turkish officials were not sure whether they could rely on Britain’s aid in the event of war with Italy and Germany. Loraine wrote Eden to say that he was “against statements or assurances unless their meaning and obligation were entirely clear,” and he was “most in favour of material assistance in the ways that Turkey most needed and desired it.”

Following the declaration of the Anschluss in 1938, Britain’s political and military leadership favoured granting assistance to Turkey, and in May 1938, Turkey concluded an accord with the Export Credits Guarantee Department to receive two loans for industrial development and defence. According to Loraine, Atatürk, the power behind the government and the army, was “most assiduous in forging the links of sympathy, friendship and cooperation between Turkey and the UK. These events revealed that while Turkey increased its influence by forging new commercial ties with the US, Britain maintained its predominant role in Turkish foreign policy. Thus, while Pax Americana loomed on the horizon, Pax Britannica, though weakened, still prevailed.

The complex dynamics of triangular relations during WWII

The period of WWII was marked by Turkey’s arduous efforts to preserve its neutrality by walking a diplomatic tightrope amidst escalating British pressures for Turkish involvement. The historical conditioning of the Turkish leaders marked by a decade of wars, particularly of figures such as President İnönü, shaped the foreign policy making process in a single party regime. Therefore, these leaders viewed their capabilities realistically and adopted a pragmatic approach that left no room for adventurism. Given that the primary goal was to keep Turkey out of the war and territorially intact, Turkish leaders strove to transform the status of their strategically located state from a liability into an asset by benefiting economically from their situation while avoiding military conflict.

On the eve of WWII, A.Ş. Esmer defined Turkey’s attitude towards the Allied powers of WWI in this way: “Were we to remain eternally enemies of those who tried to get us to sign the Sèvres Treaty? In international relations, there are no eternal friendships and eternal enemies, there is only the matter of eternal interest.” In May 1939, the governments of Turkey and Britain declared their intention to conclude a long-term reciprocal agreement,
which led to the signing of the Treaty of Alliance between Turkey, Britain and France (19 October 1939). The Alliance had different meanings for the Turks and the British, however. For the Turks, it was an insurance policy in case of an urgent defence need, “while for the British it was a means of effective action in the Balkans and the Middle East.”\(^62\) In this context, Turkey became a card for Churchill to play at the right moment.\(^63\)

Consequently, on various occasions Britain demanded Turkey’s participation in the war in accordance with the Treaty of Alliance. The first demand was made after Italy entered the war in June 1940, when war had spread to the Mediterranean area.\(^64\) Britain made its second demand for Turkey to join the war when Italy attacked Greece in October 1940. İnönü told British ambassador Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen that “it would be no good to provoke the Soviets now as they could in the course of time come around to the Allies’ side.”\(^65\) Ankara furthermore argued that their alliance was with both Britain and France, and the collapse of the French defence (June 20) invalidated Turkey’s obligations. Subsequently, therefore, the Allies would be unable to provide any effective support to Turkey in the case of war with the Axis powers. On 26 June 1940, Turkey officially declared its non-belligerency.\(^66\)

Britain in fact did fail to provide Turkey with the crucial defence equipment, such as anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns, that it had previously promised. Instead, the British began to pressure Washington to extend Lend-Lease aid to Turkey via Britain.\(^67\) While Britain insisted on all aid to Turkey being delivered via British agencies, Ankara had little confidence in Britain and was particularly perplexed by the earlier British diversion of Lend-Lease shipments from Turkey to Egypt to bolster the British war effort in Africa. Thus, the Turks preferred direct transfer from the US.\(^68\) The adamant British position that Turkish demands be processed through the British Coordinating Committee in Ankara ultimately resulted in a compromise whereby a US member joined the committee.\(^69\) This is a good example of the many instances during the war when Ankara’s attempts to deal directly with the US were hindered by Britain’s assertion of primacy in issues involving Turkey. While initial hints of a Turkish desire for enhanced ties with the US cropped up, Turkey still remained within the realm of Pax Britannica.

In the 1930s Turkey’s political and economic attitude was altered by war conditions. Ankara was unable to implement the second five-year plan, which had been prepared just before the war. Nor could Turkey play an active role in the Balkans, given that from 1941 onwards the region was occupied by the Axis Powers. While it was under serious pressure to participate in a Balkan campaign advocated by Britain, Turkey was trying hard not to be dragged into the war, as Ş. S. Aydemir highlighted dulce bellum inexpertis.\(^70\) On the one hand, Ankara was aware that the Turkish people could not handle another war after having fought continuously for over ten years, and on the other Turkish officials felt suspicious of Britain because of its deal with the USSR over the 1941 partition of Azerbaijan. They did not like the idea of having Allied military material supplies delivered to Turkey through Britain’s Middle East Command. The Turkish Military Attaché in Washington Cemal Aydnalp even interpreted the situation as Britain’s pledge to the USSR to keep the Turkish army weak.\(^71\)

Starting with the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Churchill insisted on expediting Turkey’s entrance into the war, but the US military was hesitant. After obtaining Roosevelt’s promise “to play the hand” in Turkey for Britain as well as for the US, Churchill flew to Adana to convince İnönü to bring Turkey into the war. In his memoirs Churchill wrote that Roosevelt hoped Turkey “should be safe and strong” and “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 will follow.”\(^72\) İnönü revealed to Churchill his dual
concerns about the Turkish army’s need to be well equipped prior to its direct involvement in the war and the prospect of a Soviet threat in the post-war era.\textsuperscript{73}

At this stage, to avoid diverting forces from an operation across the channel, the US still favoured Turkish neutrality. However, in August 1943, even though the Combined Chiefs of Staff elected to make the cross-channel attack a priority, stressing that the time was not ripe for Turkey to enter the war, Churchill, without informing Roosevelt, cabled Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East General Wilson in Washington, to “see what help he could get from the Turk” in starting up operations in the Aegean islands following the Italian Armistice in September.\textsuperscript{74} Early on in their Aegean operations, the British forces had surrendered to the Germans, justifying two related concerns of Turkey: First, the Germans could easily bombard any place on the western coast of Turkey; and second, the British could not not respond to the Germans effectively. Justifying the latter concern, Britain deferred to US insistence that “no forces be diverted to Turkey from the Italian and European theatres”, and declined to send Turkey any additional assistance.\textsuperscript{75} Clearly, while Britain was quite eager to push Turkey into the war, the US showed caution. This difference in attitude towards Turkey was based not only on the different strategies of the two countries, but also on Britain’s willingness to take a more active part than the US in Turkey’s neighborhood.

From the Cairo meeting to the opening of the second front in Normandy (June 1944), London unsuccessfully pressured Turkey to enter the war, and finally asked its military delegation in Turkey to leave Ankara.\textsuperscript{76} By the end of the Normandy operation, Soviet occupation of Bulgaria and Romania, along with the Churchill-Stalin agreement in Moscow (9-18 October) on the division of the Balkans into spheres of influence, spawned suspicion in the Turkish leaders of British and Soviet post-war aims.\textsuperscript{77} Nonetheless, on February 23, 1945, in accordance with the conclusions reached at the Yalta Conference, Turkey declared war against Germany and Japan. This was done not owing to British or American pressures, but because of Turkey’s desire to become a founding member of the UN. Subsequently, Turkey and the US agreed that payments for the delivery of Lend-Lease goods of American origin to Turkey would be made directly to the US, a change indicating the diminishing role of Britain, in terms of financial transfers, at least.\textsuperscript{78}

In the immediate post-war context of volatility new security challenges emerged for Turkey in particular when the USSR denounced the 1925 Turkish-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality (19 March 1945) and sought to conclude a new treaty.\textsuperscript{79} The British were indifferent to Soviet demands that Turkey accept rectification along its eastern border and grant them bases on the Straits,\textsuperscript{80} and Washington also refrained from acting, fearing that such a move would disrupt the approaching Potsdam Conference.\textsuperscript{81} At this point, the US was still wary of deepening its political engagement in this region. In fact, the Turkish ambassador in Washington Hüseyin Ragip Baydur gave this interpretation of the US attitude on the issue: “The US is now in a strong position to speak out for the international regime. Among other questions, it finds itself of necessity to be engaged with the Straits question, but at the same time it does not know exactly what to do.”\textsuperscript{82} Nonetheless, by attempting to consolidate its naval power, the US assumed a more active role in regard to the Straits. At the Potsdam conference (July 1945), acting on new American President Harry S Truman’s belief that it was in the strategic interest of the US to internationalize all waterways including the Straits, Washington proposed that an international conference be held to adapt the Straits’ status to existing conditions. Perceiving the rise of Pax Americana, Ankara announced that it might accept a possible adaptation as long as it did not endanger the security and sovereignty of Turkey.\textsuperscript{83}
Ankara became more aware of Britain’s change in attitude when Churchill had to step down after the July elections. While, on the one hand, the new government hoped to prove its interest in the Middle East by bringing the Regent of Iraq from Italy to spend four days in Istanbul, on the warship HMS Ajax (escorted by the HMS Marne and the HMS Meteor), on the other hand, it believed that military presence in the region was an economic burden for Britain. Mindful of the ambiguities in British policy, in December 1945 the Turkish government wrote to the US Secretary of State emphasizing that US suggestions for dialogues on the Straits’ status were essential to Turkey. Moreover, when Moscow began using the mass media to broadcast its territorial demands of Turkey, the US Secretary of State declared emphatically that these demands extended beyond the limits of Turkish-Soviet relations, that they were in the legal domain of the UN, and that the US would never allow such a violation to occur.

In naval terms, the transition from Pax Britannica, epitomized by the Turkish fleet’s visit to Malta in 1936, to Pax Americana, epitomized by the USS Missouri’s visit to Istanbul in 1946, took on an important symbolic dimension. On January 25, 1946, when US Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson proposed that as a diplomatic courtesy Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Münir Ertegün’s remains should be returned to Turkey aboard a battleship, Truman welcomed the idea. The prospect of a USS Missouri visit to Turkey was announced to the US public on March 6 1946, one day after Churchill had delivered his iron curtain speech in the US. Because the US government was still trying to formulate an effective strategy to deal with Stalin, it warned the press that this was merely a diplomatic gesture to honour Ertegün for his contributions to Turkish-American relations.

As a power gesture to encourage Turkey and Greece, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal proposed to Secretary of State James Francis Brynes that a task force be sent to accompany the USS Missouri in the Mediterranean. The British were dismayed when they were informed that the USS Missouri had left for Turkey without the accompanying task force, arguing that the most effective power gesture would be for the entire task force to sail into the Sea of Marmara. The change of plan apparently stemmed from a high demand for naval forces in East Asia and possibly from Brynes’ changing views toward the unfolding Iranian crisis; at issue also was the US desire to avoid military commitments in this region that were not sanctioned by the UN. While Washington was unwilling to make a grand gesture, the symbolic significance of the USS Missouri visit remained as a sign of growing US support for Turkey in an increasingly hostile international environment. This incident of ‘diplomatic courtesy’ being transformed into a strategic move of ‘gunboat diplomacy,’ was one of the first signs of the tougher stance taken by the US against Soviet expansionism, and one that was welcomed by Turkey’s leaders in their quest to enhance Turkey’s security by establishing closer relations with the US.

Rising Pax Americana and Turkey’s Positioning in the Newly Emerging International Order

The advent of the Cold War marks the end of the critical transformation of Turkey from a reticent ally of Britain to an enthusiastic ally of the US, the rising power of the new world order. On 6 April 1946, even before containment became one of the main pillars of Cold War US foreign policy, Truman declared that the US bore responsibility for preserving peace in the Middle East, indicating that Britain required US support in the region. Reflecting this perception, the London press attaché office report on Middle Eastern policy pointed out that Britain would profit from the establishment of US bases in the Mediterranean. The report also stressed that British policy was no longer based on a strategy of defending only the Suez Canal.
against the Soviet threat, but that it took the entire region into account. Britain therefore moved its defence line north, toward Iraq, Palestine and Turkey.

On 8 August 1946, the USSR delivered its first diplomatic note to the Turkish government demanding a new regime for the Straits, which would thereafter be defended jointly by Turkey and the USSR. A copy of this note was also sent to Britain and the US. The US responded first, still agreeing to revise the Straits’ status, but rejecting the proposal for a new regime. London soon conveyed a similar message, signifying Britain’s recognition of the increasing influence of the US in the region. Finally, the Turkish note of August 22 rejected the Soviet claims and emphasized that joint control would contradict Turkey’s sovereignty. Subsequently, several Turkish officials expressed their hope for more US involvement in the region. Prime Minister Recep Peker, in his interview with American Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin, averred that in an uncertain post-world war era the US could make itself highly appreciated by abandoning its isolationism and serving humanity with its moral, technical and material abilities. İnönü also “repeatedly expressed his desire to see closer military and economic cooperation established between Turkey and the US.” On September 24, Turkey rejected a second Soviet note after consulting with Washington and London. The next month, in a show of support for Turkey, a fleet of US vessels joined the USS Missouri in Istanbul.

While Turkish officials were preoccupied with the Soviet notes, the British openly admitted to Washington that they had only limited capacity to interfere in the region. On 24 February 1947, they informed Acheson in a secret telegram that “in view of the British economic and financial situation”, they could “no longer continue to carry the burden of the economic and military support of the Greek and Turkish governments.” They also underscored the importance of aid by arguing that without it, Greek and Turkish independence would not last, and that the rest of the Middle East might fall under Soviet influence as well. During the Washington meeting to assess the necessity of assisting Greece and Turkey, US officials observed that “the British government seemed to feel itself unable to maintain its imperial structure on the same scale as in the past.” In respect to Turkey, after Ankara requested additional military, naval and air force advisers from Britain, which could not provide them, Britain proposed that the US equip and train the Turkish armed forces. According to London, Turkey needed to approach the US for further credit for military reorganisation. After consulting British and Turkish officials, the US agreed to provide aid to Turkey.

Thus, in early 1947, when post-war economic constraints had rendered Britain unable to maintain its role as the principle supporter of Greece and Turkey, the fear of Soviet domination, especially in Greece, prompted a more extensive US engagement. The Turkish situation was not nearly as alarming as the dire internal strife and prospect of a communist takeover of Greece. In fact, on March 4, US Ambassador to Turkey Edwin C. Wilson reported that the USSR was not likely to attack Turkey. He added that “we must be careful not to unconsciously play the Soviet game by saddling Turkey with too heavy a financial burden for equipment furnished”. George Kennan also objected to the idea of offering military aid to Turkey, which bordered the USSR. He found this strategy too provocative, and wondered how the US would react if Soviet military supplies suddenly appeared in Mexico.

The Truman administration overruled these objections, arguing that while Turkey was not under immediate threat, an eventual Soviet takeover of Turkey would have disastrous consequences. Reflecting the US administration’s will to be more involved in the region, it also underlined the difficulties that Turkey faced in developing economically while simultaneously trying to modernize its huge military establishment. In his speech on 12 March 1947, Truman highlighted the US obligation “to assist all free peoples threatened by attack from without or
subversion from within,” although he hardly mentioned Turkey. Ultimately, mainly because of concern over Greece, the US Congress approved military assistance to Turkey, a decision in accord with Turkey’s desire to side with the relatively stronger power during a turbulent period of transition and thus secure its place as a legitimate and respected member of the new international order. This decision also reflected the British position concerning the need to strengthen Greece and Turkey economically and militarily.

Turkey perceived the Truman Doctrine as offering it a chance to modernize and enhance its armed forces. Although at this point a direct attack by the USSR was quite unlikely, a more formal association with the US bolstered Ankara's confidence in its security and served as the first concrete step on the way to institutionalizing the Turkey-US alliance. Peker told an American reporter John P. Leacacas that the hundred million dollars proposed for US aid to Turkey was “too little in view of drastic need for mechanization and consequent saving of manpower in the Turkish Army.” US Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs William L. Clayton testified that “the necessity for assisting Turkey in bearing the burdens of her military defence is real and an immediate beginning should be made.” With the role of Britain in this region diminishing, the Truman Doctrine symbolized the start of more active US engagement to counter the rising security challenges. At the same time, the US Military Mission emphasized its hope that “the American proposals would not interfere in the slightest degree with British assistance.” American instructors preferred to work in different areas than the British ones and tried to coordinate overlapping work, showing that the US did not want simply to replace but to operate in close accord with Britain in providing help for Turkey.

Turkish leaders moreover were eager to benefit from the Marshall Plan (1948), 13 billion dollars US economic package to aid Europe’s post-war recovery. In his interview with Leacacos Peker told the American reporter that Turkey had sufficient resources to finance the essential requirements of its civilian economy, but more capital would be required for economic improvement, industrial recovery and long-range planning. Even though exclusion from any long-term US credit or grant aid frustrated the Turkish government, American planners maintained that the Truman Doctrine had dealt with Turkey’s most urgent needs. An important factor at this point was Turkey’s domestic concerns stemming from its transition from a one-party to a multi-party system. Because it perceived rapid economic development as the key to political power, the Turkish government felt strongly pressured to benefit from the Marshall Plan. Hence, when in July 1947 the Turkish delegation went to Paris to underscore the importance of Marshall-Plan assistance to Turkey, they supported their economic demands with political and strategic arguments, proposing a five-year plan that came to $615 million in economic assistance for development. In March 1948 the Turkish authorities’ persistence finally bore fruit, when the US allocated $10 million in credit as the first instalment of an economic assistance package that Turkey received with warm appreciation. These developments can be viewed as an important prelude vis-a-vis Turkey’s incorporation into an emerging new world order led by the US.

Conclusion

During the complex period of transition in triangular relations this article has examined, Turkey was a late and reluctant participant in Pax Britannica. Whereas in the immediate aftermath of WWII, Ankara was quite enthusiastic toward becoming a part of the rising new world order of Pax Americana, this enthusiasm was initially neither welcomed by London nor reciprocated by Washington. However, in the decade that began with the Turkish fleet’s visit to Malta in 1936 and ended with the USS Missouri’s visit to Istanbul in 1946, there occurred a
shift from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana* that simultaneously illustrated the resilience of Britain’s role in Turkish affairs.

Turkish leaders, drawing on their experience of WWI, began in 1935 to predict that victory in any coming war would fall to whichever powers controlled the seas.\(^{120}\) When the British acknowledged that financial constraints portended the end of their preeminent position in regard to Greece and Turkey, the US agreed to fill the impending vacuum by drawing on the Truman Doctrine to extend military assistance to the two countries. A few months before Turkey became a beneficiary of the Marshall Plan (January 1948), Ernest Bevin, in a speech delivered to the House of Commons, said, “We are, indeed, at a critical moment in the organization of the post-war world.”\(^{121}\)

This transition that culminated in a bipolar international system marked the further demise of *Pax Britannica* as well, through the subsequent consolidation of *Pax Americana*. The autonomous space that regional powers such as Turkey had used quite effectively for more independent action during the transitional period of the interwar era would be much more limited thenceforth, for this systemic change would trigger a quest for these countries to secure a place in the multinational organizations and particularly in the security frameworks of this rising new international order. The year NATO was founded, a book was published that reflected the Turkish leaders’ views on Pan-Americanism, warning that the principles of international laws and institutions were obliged to include the doctrines of Pan-Americanism since the centre of international activities had moved to the American continent.\(^{122}\)

Turkey’s relations with Britain and the US in the 1929-1947 period also affected the way Turkey perceived itself in the Balkans and the Middle East. The Turkish Republic, only recently founded, in 1923, did not clearly formulate the course its foreign policy would follow until 1929, at the advent of the World Economic Crisis. From 1929 onward, Turkey tried to pursue a more autonomous foreign policy, identifying itself as a Balkan country and focusing on its relations with its neighbours who had similar economic and political concerns, rather than such European powers as Britain. However, because of the unstable situation in Europe, Turkey set aside its distrust of Britain and in 1935 made efforts to become integrated into the *Pax Britannica*. During the war years, however, with the occupation of the Balkans by the Axis powers, Turkey’s image as a Balkan country had to change also, and by the end of the war, as the transition from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana* became more evident, Turkey’s efforts to develop closer relations with the US bore fruit. The Truman Doctrine marked Turkey’s first step in becoming part of the Western bloc, and its membership into NATO followed in 1952, when, against Britain’s will, Turkey’s self-identification as ‘Western’ rather than the ‘Middle Eastern’ was officially accepted. In this emerging regional and global context marking the ultimate shift to *Pax Americana*, Turkey was cast in a different role: that of regarding itself as part of the new world.

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