

Turkey's National Security Perceptions in the Early Republican Period Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenlik Algılamaları

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Abstract

This study seeks answers to the questions of what the national security environment of Turkey looked like in the early years of the Republic and what the main threat perceptions were. Since the Republic was declared after a war of national independence, Turkey pursued a foreign policy aimed at securing its independence and sovereign rights and tried to consolidate the newly established regime. Security perceptions shaped in this framework played an important role in determining Turkey's national security policies in the following years. The experience of the War of Independence is one of the most important sources of Turkey's sensitivity to its full independence and sovereignty rights. The construction of a new political regime and national state with the proclamation of the Republic shaped the perceptions of threats to the security of the regime. The tensions in the European great power politics in the interwar period are one of the important developments that reveal Turkey's pro-status quo and defensive security understanding. In this context, it is argued that it is important to evaluate Turkey's historical experience in the early years of the Republic in terms of understanding today's national security policies.

Key Words: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey's National Security, Regime Security, Turkish Foreign Policy During Atatürk Era

Öz

Bu çalışma, Cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarında Türkiye'nin ulusal güvenlik çevresinin nasıl bir görünüme sahip olduğu ve başlıca tehdit algılarının neler olduğu sorularına yanıt aramaktadır. Cumhuriyetin bir ulusal bağımsızlık savaşının ardından ilan edilmesi nedeniyle, Türkiye bağımsızlığını ve egemenlik haklarını güvence altına almayı amaçlayan bir dış politika izlemiştir ve kurulan yeni rejimin konsolide edilmesine yönelik bir çaba harcamıştır. Bu çerçevede şekillenen güvenlik algılamaları sonraki yıllarda da Türkiye'nin ulusal güvenlik politikalarının belirlenmesinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bağımsızlığın Kurtuluş Savaşı ile kazanılma-

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sı Türkiye'nin tam bağımsızlık ve egemenlik hakları konusundaki hassasiyetinin en önemli kaynaklarından biridir. Cumhuriyetin ilanıyla yeni bir siyasi rejimin ve ulusal devletin inşa edilmesi rejim güvenliğine yönelik tehdit algılamalarını şekillendirmiştir. İki savaş arası dönemde Avrupa güç dengelerindeki sarsıntı ise Türkiye'nin statükocu ve savunmacı güvenlik anlayışını ortaya çıkaran önemli gelişmelerden biridir. Bu çerçevede Türkiye'nin günümüz ulusal güvenlik politikalarının anlaşılması bakımından Cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarındaki tarihsel tecrübesini değerlendirmenin önemli olduğu iddia edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Türkiye'nin Ulusal Güvenliği, Rejim Güvenliği, Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası

Introduction

Security is one of the most controversial concepts in international relations. There are deep disagreements about what the concept of security is, how it can be defined, which issues should, and which should not, be considered as security issues.¹ However, it is more or less clear what is meant by security. Security is about the survival of a referent object that has a legitimate right to survive and existential threats to that referent object.² In this respect, discussions on the concept of security focus on the two questions of who or what should be protected and who or what threatens its security.³

In this study, Turkey's security perceptions in the early years of the Republic will be discussed. However, the concept of security was not used neither in Turkey's legal and institutional structure, nor in its political discourse in this period.⁴ Therefore, it is important to answer the two questions given above regarding the concept of security. The referent object that should be protected was the Republic of Turkey as a newly established state and its political regime. Threats, on the other hand, stemmed from both the opposition to the new regime established inside and the enemies outside.

In this context, the main questions that this study seeks to answer are what were the main threats faced by Turkey as a state that has just gained its independence, how these threats were handled and what methods were used to overcome them. Rather than the nature of these threats, the focus is on which threats the new Turkey's decision makers were more concerned about and why. The conditions that led to these perceptions and the main objecti-

1 Steve Smith, "The contested concept of security", In Ken Booth (Ed.), *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2005, pp. 27-62. Barry Buzan, *People, states & fear: an agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era*, (Second Edition), ECPR Press, Colchester, 2007.

2 Barry Buzan et. al., *Security: a new framework for analysis*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 1998, p. 21.

3 Terry Terriff et.al. *Security studies today*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 3.

4 Gencer Özcan, "Türkiye'de milli güvenlik kavramının gelişimi". In Evren Balta Pakler - İsmet Akça, Eds., *Türkiye'de ordu, devlet ve güvenlik siyaseti*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2010, pp. 307-349.

ves of the security strategies followed will be discussed.

Security perceptions significantly affect political and social development in Turkey. It can be argued that a particular security culture, which is influenced by historical experiences, is effective in political decision-making procedures and institutions.⁵ In the evolution of this culture, security perceptions of the Atatürk period played a decisive role. It is possible to consider this period in three subperiods.

The first is the years of the War of Independence, which will end with the proclamation of the Republic and lasted between 1919-1923. This was a life and death war against foreign enemies trying to break up Turkey. In this context, one of the main factors determining Turkey's security culture is the concern about the malicious plans of foreign powers against Turkey. Another is the sensitivity to the sovereignty rights of the independent Turkish state.

After the proclamation of the Republic on October 29, 1923, the construction of the new state became the main goal. The years between 1923 and 1930 is a period of political reform in which the empire was liquidated, and the nation-state was built. At the same time, Turkey, which made its independence and sovereign rights recognized by the international community with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, followed a foreign policy based on protecting these gains. Therefore, the main problems that shape security perceptions appear in two areas. In domestic politics, it is necessary to implement social and political reforms quickly and to neutralize the opposition that resists these reforms. In foreign policy, there was a need for an environment of stability and peace that would consolidate these reforms. Threats to the political regime and the need to protect the Lausanne status quo still affect Turkey's security perceptions today.

Turkey's security perceptions began to change in 1930. This change was mostly related to external factors. In addition to the global economic crisis, the increasing tension in European great power politics has pushed Turkey into a defensive stance in foreign policy. The most decisive threat was Italy's expansionist policies in the Mediterranean. Turkey got closer to Britain and France in the face of this threat. An independent and well-balanced foreign policy has become the primary method of providing security against external threats. This understanding of diplomacy has been one of the unchanging features of Turkish foreign policy until today.

The three periods mentioned above are discussed in three separate parts. Each period reflects its own threat perceptions. However, the understanding of security shaped by these perceptions continues to affect Turkey's current foreign and security policy. It is important to define security percep-

5 Ali L. Karasmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey". *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No: 1, 2000, pp. 199-216. Mustafa Aydın, "Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey". *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 3, No: 2, 2003, pp. 163-184.

tions in the early Republican period to understand the insecurities Turkey has faced in domestic and foreign policy from the past to present.

Saving the Homeland, 1919-1923

The Armistice of Mondros of October 30, 1918, signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied States at the end of the First World War, was not a treaty that paved the way for a lasting peace treaty. It prepared the ground for the invasion of Anatolia with some privileges it granted to the Allied States. After the armistice, they started to occupy Anatolia without wasting time. Under these circumstances, Turkey's security situation was a matter of survival.

In his Great Speech, Mustafa Kemal first explains the state of the country when he arrived in Samsun on May 19, 1919, and then discusses what decisions can be taken for salvation under these conditions: "In these circumstances, one resolution [sic] alone was possible, namely, to create a New Turkish State, the sovereignty and independence of which would be unreservedly recognized [sic]."⁶ Accordingly, during the War of Independence, the main security goal was the liberation of the homeland from enemy occupation and to establish a fully independent new state. This situation was defined by Mustafa Kemal as "either independence or death".

First, it should be emphasized that although the War of Independence may seem like a war against the invading Greek army, it was fought on other fronts as well, namely Armenia in the East, France in the South, and the United Kingdom in Istanbul. On the other hand, a diplomatic and military struggle was waged against the Allied Powers supporting Greece. Diplomacy, which is carried out to take advantage of the differences of interest among the Allied Powers, is one of the factors that ensure the success of the Turkish National Movement. Balancing the Allied Powers with the support of the Soviet Union also played an important role in this diplomatic success.

The Ankara government has tried to announce the aims of the national movement to the international society in all its diplomatic activities. The primary objective of Ankara's diplomacy has been to legitimize the war of liberation. In other words, it was intended to make the international society accept that the independent Turkish state is a referent object that has a legitimate right to maintain its existence.

At the beginning of the national struggle, Mustafa Kemal's goal of creating a sovereign and independent Turkish state meant the rejection of all the claims of Allied States in Anatolia. The mandate or protection of any foreign country was not considered an option, and it was fought to end the occupations that started after the Mondros Armistice. In other words, the War of Independence was anti-imperialist war against the western great powers

6 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *A Speech Delivered by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk 1927*, Başbakanlık Basımevi, Ankara, 1981, p. 9.

and the small states they support. However, Mustafa Kemal has never used anti-Western language. Because, although he rejected imperialism, he wanted to create a modern Western-style nation-state.⁷

It aimed to become a part of the European states system through the recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the Turkish nation-state. In one aspect, the anti-imperialist discourse is a product of the quest for the support of the Soviet Union against Allied states. This discourse appeals to all eastern societies and demands their support. Therefore, it has a pragmatic dimension. Moreover, it can be said that Mustafa Kemal emphasized anti-imperialism more frequently in his contacts with the Soviet Union. For example, in 1921, to the Ukrainian Ambassador Frunze, he said: "The army and people of Turkey who worked with joy from youngest to eldest to win the Sakarya victory, were particularly touched by the friendly support shown in Russia and Ukraine and in all the Eastern countries, both during and after the battle. This support has proven that all the peoples of the East are aware that people of Turkey fought for the salvation of all these peoples at the Battle of Sakarya."⁸

In another example, Mustafa Kemal stated the following words during a dinner with Russian and Iranian Ambassadors on July 7, 1922: "All our friends have expressed that Turkey's current struggle does not only belong to Turkey, but I feel the need to confirm it once more. If Turkey had struggle on its behalf, this struggle would be shorter, less bloody and could be done more quickly. Turkey is making an important effort and persevering. Because she defends the cause of all oppressed nations, the whole East and Turkey is sure that Eastern nations will walk together until this struggle ends."⁹

Even though Turkey had fought against a threat stemming from the West, she justified the national struggle not with anti-Westernism but with anti-imperialism. In addition, cooperation with the Soviet Union against Western states strengthened the anti-imperialist discourse of the national struggle. Soviet support had been extremely decisive in winning the War of Independence, but this cooperation was a pragmatic choice for Turkey. In these years, the two countries' enemies were the same, but their ultimate goals were completely different.¹⁰ Indeed, anti-imperialism became the common political pursuit of the two countries, but Turkey had avoided using anti-capitalist rhetoric. Mustafa Kemal said the following about communism in an interview: "Communism is a social issue. The state and social conditions of our country, the strength of its religious and national traditions confirm the opinion that communism in Russia is not suitable for us. Lately, the poli-

7 Oral Sander, "Türkiye'nin dış politikasında sürekliliğin nedenleri", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 37, No. 3-4, 1982, p. 107.

8 *Atatürk'ün söylev ve demeçleri II: (1906-1938), Fifth Edition*, Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Yayınları, Ankara, 1997, p. 26.

9 *Ibid.* p. 44.

10 Roderic H. Davison, "Turkish Diplomacy from Mudros to Lausanne". In Gordon A. Craig - Felix Gilbert (Eds.), *The Diplomats 1919-1939*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1953, p. 184.

tical parties formed based on communism in our country have been convinced of the need to end their activities by realizing this fact with experience. Even the Russian thinkers themselves believe in the certainty of this truth for us. Consequently, our relationship and friendship with the Russians is only relevant to the principles of cooperation and alliance of two independent states.”¹¹

The reason why Turkey insistently emphasizes that it is not anti-Western and not communist despite using anti-imperialist rhetoric is to consolidate the legitimacy of the Turkish National Movement. Another example of this situation can be seen in National Oath (Misak-ı Milli). This set of decisions made by the last term of the Ottoman Parliament wanted to glorify Turkey by keeping it small.¹² National Oath does not contain any sovereignty demands outside the boundaries drawn by the Mondros Armistice. It was emphasized that the goal of national struggle is limited to national independence and territorial integrity. Realist goals in accordance with international law, which are limited to ensuring the recognition of Turkey’s sovereign rights, have strengthened the legitimacy of the national struggle.

The Ankara government and the Allied States started peace negotiations in Lausanne after the military success of the national struggle. Turkey could not get all its demands accepted at this conference and even made many concessions. However, she has been extremely insistent on independence and territorial integrity. Lord George Curzon, who was the head of the British Delegation at the Lausanne Peace Conference, told İsmet Pasha, the head of the Turkish Delegation, during the meetings: “İsmet, you remind me of nothing so much as a music box, for you play the same old tune over and over and over again -sovereignty, sovereignty, sovereignty.”¹³

Turkey has achieved its main goal of national independence and territorial integrity with the Lausanne Peace Treaty. This treaty was signed after negotiations on equal terms. With this feature, it is unique among the peace treaties signed after the First World War.¹⁴ It is also the only treaty still in force among these treaties.

With the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey, whose sovereignty rights were recognized by the international community, turned into a state satisfied with the status quo. Since this date, maintaining the status quo of Lausanne has become one of the most determining principles of Turkish foreign policy.¹⁵ Turkey did not want more when it obtained its territorial claims, which were

11 *Atatürk’ün söylev ve demeçleri III: (1918-1937)*, Fifth Edition, Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Yayınları, Ankara, 1997, p. 26.

12 Patrick Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, Weidenfield, London, 1990, p. 458.

13 Joseph C. Grew, *Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years, 1904-1945, Vol 1-II*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1952, p. 525.

14 Davison, “Turkish Diplomacy from...”, Op. cit., p. 172.

15 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol - Emre Ozan, “Türk dış politikasında süreklilik unsuru olarak siyasal rejim”, *Gazi Akademik Bakış*, Vol. 4, No: 8, 2011, pp. 13-38.

already restricted. For example, the irredentist rhetoric that emerged during the First World War was abandoned and such goals were firmly rejected. Mustafa Kemal stated the following in his big speech: "There is nothing in history to show how the policy of Panislamism and Panturanism could have succeeded or how they could have found a basis for their realization on this earth. (...) The political system which we regard as clear and fully realizable is national policy."¹⁶

This discourse means the rejection of the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire and the re-establishment of the political and social structure based on the nation-state. This has had many consequences in the field of security and foreign policy. First, Turkey's shrinking borders have created a more homogeneous society. However, as minority problems were a reason for the intervention of great powers in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire, a solution was required to eliminate these problems. Turkey had met this need through the provisions of the Lausanne Peace Treaty on minorities and the population exchange with Greece.

On the other hand, while preparing the National Oath, the Turkish dominated regions wanted to be included in the borders. No claim of sovereignty was made in the regions where Turks were a minority, only the rights of Turks were demanded to be guaranteed. This approach shows that Turkey focuses on ensuring national unity within its existing borders rather than expanding its borders. In other words, Turkey tried to turn its territorial losses into an advantage and gave priority to nation-state building. Especially the loss of Arab lands did not create a great psychological shock in Turkish politics. This loss was seen as an opportunity to erase the eastern and Islamic foundations of the state and create a Western-styled nation-state.¹⁷

Turkey's perception of security during the War of Independence is related to the establishment of a sovereign and fully independent state. The main goal of the national struggle was to end the occupation in Anatolia and to make Turkey's sovereign rights recognized by the international society. Having to fight to assert its legitimate rights to exist has also shaped Turkey's future perceptions of security. The fact that Turkey has been very sensitive about equal sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity throughout the history of the Republic is a product of the War of Independence experience. This phenomenon, often referred to as Sèvres Syndrome, is based on the perception that any diplomatic and political initiative from the international community aims to divide Turkey.¹⁸ The events during the armistice period and the content of the Treaty of Sèvres show that this perception is not completely groundless.

16 Atatürk, *A Speech Delivered by...*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 379.

17 Geoffrey Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1974, p. 133.

18 Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times*, Institute for Security Studies European Union (Chaillot Paper 92), Paris, 2006, pp. 32-33.

Building the Republic, 1923-1930

After the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, there were two challenges that determine the perception of security. First, the political and economic independence achieved in difficult conditions had to be defended and protected against external threats. On the other hand, there were some foreign policy problems that have not been fully resolved with the Lausanne. Second, a modern national state had to be built. Remarkable reforms were initiated in domestic policy while there was a tough foreign policy agenda. But this transformation in domestic policy required a stable foreign policy environment.

Mustafa Kemal explained this situation in a speech in the Assembly as follows: “Gentlemen; the principle of honesty in our foreign policy and the attention to the security of our country and the immunity of its development guide our movement. Nothing can be more easily explained than a country undergoing fundamental reform and development really desires peace and tranquility both inside and abroad.”¹⁹

If we first look at the security concerns in foreign policy, the most serious threat Turkey perceives in terms of territorial integrity and independence originates from the West. The main reason for the threat perception is the problems left over from Lausanne. In order to focus on internal transformation, Turkey needed to solve these problems first. The status of Mosul, the Ottoman debts, and the population exchange with Greece were the most important problems waiting to be solved. In the following period, other problems such as the status of the Orthodox Greek Patriarchate, the nationalization of foreign companies, and Turkish education in foreign schools were added to these problems.²⁰ Due to all these problems, Turkey’s relations with Western countries were tense in the 1920s.

Turkey’s concerns about its national independence continued because of these problems with Western countries. These concerns were not limited to political and diplomatic independence. The question of economic independence was also a securitized issue. The capitulations and the role of foreign companies in the Ottoman economy were seen as the products of a colonial-type economic structure. Mustafa Kemal expressed this view in the speech he gave at the opening of the Assembly on March 1, 1922, with the following words: “Gentlemen, for Turkey, which has now embarked on a free and independent life, there are no capitulations that are strangling its economic life. And it cannot. Among the measures to be taken for directing our economic life towards certain goals and for its rapid maturation and

19 TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Devre III, İçtima Senesi 2, Cilt: 5, Birinci İnikat, 1 November 1928, s. 3.

20 A. Haluk Ülman, “Türk dış politikasına yön veren etkenler (1923-1968) I”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 23, No: 3, 1968, p. 245.

progress, we will pay attention to the restoration of industrial agriculture, which has been neglected in our country due to European competition, and to equip it with modern economic tools.”²¹

Turkey's development has been handled as a matter of survival.²² Foreign capital was viewed with suspicions and a high sensitivity was shown for economic independence. In addition, poverty in the country, lack of capital, lack of infrastructure, etc. problems led Turkey to economic statism. However, the implementation of statist policies has not been easy. While the capitulations were being negotiated during the Lausanne Peace Conference, Turkey felt the need to show that it was not against foreign capital. Foreign investors were encouraged, provided that they complied with the law. Turkey did not oppose the Western capitalist economic system but wanted to be a part of it on equal terms. In accordance with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Turkey followed a liberal foreign trade policy for five years, in return for the complete abolition of the capitulations. However, after this period expires, Turkey adopted statist economic policies more strongly with the effect of the crisis in 1929.

Turkey's diplomatic and economic problems with the West necessitated the continuation of cooperation with the Soviet Union. This cooperation was a requirement of Turkey's balanced foreign policy and had a pragmatic nature. Foreign policy, which is based on surviving by benefiting from the balance of power, has become a tradition since the Ottoman period. However, throughout the Ottoman period, the primary threat emanating from Russia and alliances were made with the Western great powers to balance Russia. This time, Soviet Russia has become a balancing actor against the Western great powers. Relations became institutionalized with the Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality signed in 1925. However, this change in Turkey's threat perception has been temporary. There were some insecurities during the periods when the relations were good, and by the mid-1930s the relations began to deteriorate.

Turkey, which has an intense domestic political agenda in this period, wanted to isolate herself from the outside to easily solve its internal problems. She followed a defensive foreign policy as a way of ensuring its internal security and stayed away from foreign policy commitments.²³ Tevfik Rüşti (Aras), who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1925 and 1939, explained the Turkish foreign policy as follows in a meeting with the US Ambassador to Ankara Joseph Grew: “Our foreign policy is simple and direct; we seek friendship with all, alliance or groupement with none.”²⁴ The main goal of this policy is to surround Turkey, which is surrounded by potential

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21 *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi Devre I, İçtima Senesi 3, Cilt: 18, Birinci İçtima, 1 March 1922, pp. 5-6.*

22 Hamza Eroğlu, “Atatürk ve Devletçilik”. *Bellekten*, Vol. 52, No: 204, 1988, pp. 357-372.

23 Brock Millman, “Turkish Foreign and Strategic Policy 1934-42”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 31, No: 3, 1995, p. 485. 483-508

24 Grew, *Turbulent Era...*, Op. cit., p. 917.

enemies, with reliable friends.

The consolidation of the republican regime, the construction of the nation-state by eliminating the imperial legacy, the implementation of secularism and the realization of social reforms for modernization created a very intense domestic political agenda. To cope with this agenda, a stable external political environment of trusted friends was essential. This foreign policy understanding, expressed by Mustafa Kemal as peace at home, peace in the world, provided the newly established state with the time necessary to build the national order.²⁵

The radical transformation in the domestic political and social structure required the silencing of dissenting voices. As a matter of fact, disagreements about the direction of the new Turkey started very early. A strong opposition group emerged among the members of the army, who continued active politics, against the new regime and the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. Mustafa Kemal prevented military service from being carried out together with active politics and kept the army under control by taking İsmet (İnönü) and Fevzi (Çakmak) to his side. The decrease in the need for the support of the army after the War of Independence was also effective in this decision. Members of the army, who could form a rival power in the political arena, were neutralized.²⁶ However, it is not possible to completely exclude the army from politics. Only the loyalty of the soldiers to the new regime and Mustafa Kemal was guaranteed.

The most important development in neutralizing the opposition was the Law on the Maintenance of Order (Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu) dated 1925. It was claimed that the members of the Progressive Republican Party participated in the Sheikh Said Rebellion that broke out in February 1925. The Law on the Maintenance of Order hastened the closure of this party. Thus, a one-party government was preferred in order to build the political and social structure required by the Republican regime.²⁷ The Law on the Maintenance of Order not only secured a one-party government, but also put pressure on all opposition groups. The first article of the law enlightening because it shows how domestic threats play a role in Turkey's security perception: "The government is authorized to prohibit any organizations, provocation, abetment, or publication that cause reaction and rebellion, violating the public order, security, social harmony or tranquility of the country."²⁸

As can be seen, the main security concern is the protection of the regime and the provision of social unity and integrity. The main threat is reactionism and anti-regime movements. Thus, the political regime itself

25 Sander, "Türkiye'nin dış politikasında...", op. cit., p. 110.

26 Daniel Lerner - Richard D. Robinson, "Swords and ploughshares: the Turkish army as a modernizing force". *World Politics*, Vol. 13, No: 1, 1960, pp. 19-44.

27 Çetin Yetkin, *Türkiye'de tek parti yönetimi 1930-1945*, Altın Kitaplar Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1983, pp. 29-30.

28 *Resmî Ceride*, 4 March 1341/1925, No: 87.

has become a referent object. The assassination attempt on Mustafa Kemal, which was discovered in June 1926, gave the government an opportunity to silence the opponents of the regime. Since this date, fundamental reforms in the direction of the construction of the nation-state and modernization have been implemented more effectively. Nation-state building necessitated secularization, the elimination of the religious law and education system inherited from the Ottoman Empire, and the complete elimination of the religious bureaucracy. The protection of the secular regime against reactionary movements has become one of the most controversial political problems in Turkey since the one-party period and the principle of secularism has turned into a securitized issue over time.²⁹

Another issue that creates insecurity in the nation-state building is related to minorities. Separatist movements also created an important security problem in the Ottoman period. This problem also has an external dimension. If one of the reasons for the success of the separatist movements was the weakening of the empire, the other was the intervention of the European powers.³⁰ This legacy, left by the Ottoman Empire, which struggled with these separatist movements for the last century and faced serious internal threats in terms of ensuring its territorial integrity, also created psychological effects on the Republican elite.³¹

One of the most controversial issues at the Lausanne Peace Conference was minorities. This was perceived as a security issue as it constitutes an obstacle to the construction of a national state. The Armenian deportation of 1915 and the population exchange with Greece after 1923 created a more homogeneous society. However, the Armenian genocide allegations and the issue of the Orthodox Greek Patriarchate became a source of insecurities in the following years. On the other hand, the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925 showed that the Kurdish issue also created insecurity, even though it took place for the sake of religion. These perceptions of threat to national integrity continue to exist today.

After the proclamation of the Republic, concerns about territorial integrity and independence shaped foreign policy. The remaining problems of Lausanne and the tensions with Western countries fed these concerns. However, the radical change in domestic politics has been more decisive in security perceptions. By the 1930s, external threats began to come to the fore.

Defending the Republic, 1930-1938

Turkey began to normalize its relations with Western countries in the 1930s. The most important development that made this possible was

29 Pınar Bilgin, "The securityness of secularism? The case of Turkey". *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, No: 6, 2008, pp. 593-614.

30 Sina Akşin, "Fransız İhtilalinin II. Meşrutiyet öncesi Osmanlı Devleti üzerindeki etkileri üzerine bazı görüşler". *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 49, No: 3, 1994, p. 26.

31 Aydın, Op. Cit., p. 168.

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the resolution of the Mosul problem in 1926 and the start of rapprochement with Britain. On the other hand, an agreement was signed with France on Ottoman debts in 1928 and the population exchange problem with Greece was finally resolved in 1930. In other words, as the unresolved problems in Lausanne were overcome, Turkey tried to improve its relations with the West. Problems that remain unresolved will also be resolved in time, thanks to the positive relations established with Western countries.

Another reason for Turkey to turn to the West is the economic crisis in 1929. In fact, Turkey, which switched to a planned economy after this crisis, is expected to get closer to the socialist Soviet Union, not to the West. There are two reasons for this seemingly contradictory development.³² First, Turkey's aim was not a socialist economy, but state interventionism, which has also become widespread in capitalist countries after the crisis. Second, the support of Western countries was required for external financing of development.

Another consequence of the economic crisis has been the retrying of the transition to multi-party democracy. The policies followed by the government in the face of the crisis led to criticism, and these criticisms were also directed at Mustafa Kemal. The establishment of a new political party was allowed to clear the line between the Government and the Presidency.³³ This step is also a result of Turkey's westward orientation. However, the Free Republican Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası), which was established by the instruction of Mustafa Kemal and under his unofficial control, became the focus of the regime opponents after a while. In this environment where internal insecurities continued, the new party was closed.

Apart from economic concerns, the most important development that forced Turkey to get closer to the West was the Italian threat. The expansionist policy of Italy in the Balkans and the East Mediterranean since the 1920s was not perceived as a direct threat by Turkey at first. In fact, there was a short-term rapprochement between 1928-1932.³⁴ However, the increasing Italian influence in the Balkans inevitably affected Turkey. Turkey's attempts to establish the Balkan Pact and to improve its relations with Britain and France were to prevent the Italian threat.³⁵

On the other hand, Hitler's coming to power in 1933 caused concern in Turkey but increasing trade with Germany pushed these concerns into the background. For example, 80% of Turkey's total foreign trade in 1937 was

32 A. Haluk Ülman - Oral Sander, "Türk dış politikasına yön veren etkenler (1923-1968) II", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 27, No: 1, 1972, p. 16.

33 Kinross, Op. cit., p. 450.

34 Dilek Barlas, "Akdeniz'de hasmane dostlar: iki dünya savaşı arasında Türkiye ve İtalya", *Doğu Batı*, No: 14, pp. 214-215.

35 Millman, Op. Cit., p. 485.

with Germany and other Central European countries.³⁶ In addition to economic relations, it can be said that the national socialist ideology also affected Turkey. The nationalist themes in the Sun Language Theory and the Turkish History Thesis developed after the 1930s in Turkey, which is trying to build a national identity, are important in this regard.³⁷

Although there was a positive atmosphere in Turkish-German relations, Hitler's policies in Europe also affected Turkish foreign policy. After its alliance with Germany in 1936, Italy followed more aggressive policies. This was the most important development that led Turkey to an alliance with Britain and France. On the other hand, Turkey's rapprochement with these countries created suspicions against Turkey in the Soviet Union. However, when the Soviet Union softened its relations with Britain and France in the face of the rising German threat, Turkey was able to act more comfortably.³⁸

Turkey pursued a more active foreign policy due to the external security challenges it faced in the 1930s. One of the manifestations of this activism is membership in the League of Nations. Turkey joined the Commission of Enquiry for European Union, which was established within the body of the League of Nations in 1930. Since 1931, she has started to send representatives to the League of Nations meetings, especially those related to disarmament.³⁹ Finally, she became a member of the League of Nations on 18 July 1932. Since then, she has played an active role in the League. In 1934, Turkey was elected as a non-permanent member of the Council of the League of Nations.

Turkey's activities in the League of Nations were aimed at producing peace and security. In addition, Turkey signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which prohibits the use of war as an instrument of national policy. She has made a positive contribution to all efforts to ensure international security. Turkey was also very careful in respecting the agreements she signed and expected the same respect from other states. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk underlined this issue as follows while addressing international politics in his public statements due to the general elections in 1935: "We tried to create fair regulations with a clean mindset that loves peace and wants to establish it in a way that is far from any offensive intentions. Today we have a unified policy and mutual agreements with countries aiming at peace and good relations between nations. (...) Today, the Turkish nation shows itself in international relations with two deep-rooted characteristics. One is that our nation has a power worthy of respect, with an unwavering determination to defend itself, and the other is the belief that our nation will be committed to its friendships and alliances with unwavering loyalty no matter the circumstances. The

36 Ülman - Sander, Op. Cit., p. 17

37 Ülman, Op. Cit., p. 253.

38 Ibid.

39 Dilek Barlas, "Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye: İyimserlik ve Kuşku Arasında". *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 14, No: 55, 2017, pp. 99.

Turkish homeland is advancing on the basis of these high qualifications of the nation.”⁴⁰

The fact that the Soviet Union became a member of the League of Nations in 1934 increased the importance Turkey attached to this organization. Turkey, which got closer to the West due to the threats it faced, did not want to harm its relations with the Soviet Union. Turkey’s realistic foreign policy approach that considers the balance of power in world politics is a way of providing national security. In line with this approach, Turkey, which continued its rapprochement with the West on the one hand, extended the Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality signed with the Soviet Union in 1925 for another ten years, on the other. Although relations were not as good as before, Turkey’s goal was to get closer to the West without conflict with the Soviet Union.

Another strategy that Turkey pursued to provide security was the effort to increase regional cooperation. The first important development in this direction was the Balkan Pact established in 1934. The rapprochement that started between Turkey and Greece after 1930 was the main factor that made the establishment of the Pact possible. Good relations with Greece were also an indication of rapprochement with Britain and France. The other members of the Pact were Romania and Yugoslavia. These two countries were allied with France through the Little Entente. In this respect, a cooperation structure has emerged that connects Turkey to France and therefore to Britain.⁴¹

After having secured its western borders with the Balkan Pact, Turkey signed the Saadabad Pact in 1937 with Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan against threats from the East. This pact was essentially a non-aggression pact, not a treaty of alliance. Some border problems with neighboring countries were resolved and mutual consultation was aimed against common problems.⁴² The Balkan Pact and the Saadabad Pact show Turkey’s efforts to create a safe and stable environment in its near abroad.

As the war in Europe approached, Turkey’s security concerns increased. As the revisionist powers became aggressive, Turkey reinforced its cooperation with the status quo countries. Seeing this cooperation as an opportunity, Turkey wanted to change the regime of the Turkish Straits, which it found inconvenient for its security. The Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits was signed in 1936. With this convention, the restrictions on the armament of the Straits were lifted and Turkey was given full authority to control the Straits in case of war. The question of Hatay was also resolved and Hatay was annexed to Turkey in June 1939. These developments

40 *Atatürk’ün tamim, telgraf ve beyannameleri IV*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara, 1991, p. 642.

41 Mehmet Gönlübol - Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, “Atatürk Dönemi Türk Dış Politikasına Genel Bir Bakış”, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Vol. 1, No: 2, 1985, p. 459.

42 Türel Yılmaz, “Cumhuriyet döneminde Türkiye’nin Ortadoğu’ya ilişkin dış politikasının genel bir değerlendirmesi”, *Türkiye Günlüğü*, No: 52, 1998, p. 44.

can be considered a revisionist policy. However, Turkey achieved these gains by acting in accordance with international law, without resorting to force.

Although Turkey got closer to Britain and France, she refrained from signing an alliance agreement with these countries. One reason was that this alliance would damage relations with the Soviet Union. Secondly, although Turkey has followed a policy of balancing one great power against the other since the Ottoman period, she has not signed an alliance agreement with any great power that would force it to go to war. The first of these reasons was more decisive because the development that led Turkey to the Triple Alliance was the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union. However, it should be underlined that Turkey has managed to stay out of the war.

Shortly after the Montreux Convention was signed, the Soviet Union's proposal to establish a pact for the joint defense of the Turkish Straits was the most important issue that disrupted bilateral relations. Turkey rejected this proposal, regarding it as a violation of her sovereign rights.⁴³ The Soviet Union did not insist on this demand, the issue was closed for a while, but after this date, the atmosphere of cooperation in Turkish-Soviet relations disappeared.

The development that worried Turkey the most was the 1939 German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Poland was invaded by these two states shortly after this agreement. Turkey was worried about being invaded by Germany and the Soviet Union, as it happened to Poland. Thereupon, the triple alliance agreement was signed with France and Britain on 9 October 1939.

Turkey's security concerns turned outward in the 1930s. The main reason for this was that the newly established regime has significantly consolidated itself and the tension between revisionist and status quo powers in European politics has escalated. Although domestic threat perceptions continue to be high, the outbreak of a major war in Europe would have destroyed Turkey's gains in both domestic and foreign policy. For this reason, Turkey devoted much of its energy abroad during the 1930s. She has endeavored to establish cooperation mechanisms and regional alliances to ensure its security.

Conclusion

Threat perceptions in the early Republic period shaped Turkey's current security understanding. First, the newly established Republic carried the weight of the Ottoman legacy. In its last years, the Ottoman Empire became an empire whose borders were constantly shrinking, whose territorial integrity was threatened both internally and externally, and whose political and economic independence was not

43 Cevat Açıkalın, "Turkey's International Relations", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 23, No: 4, 1947, p. 479.

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respected by the international community. The result of the decline of the Ottoman Empire was the occupation of many parts of the country by the Allied States after the First World War and the Treaty of Sèvres, which almost sentenced the Turkish nation to death.

In this respect, the Turkish people gave a life-and-death war under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. This war has been won and Turkey has achieved full independence with equal sovereign rights in the international community. These gains regarding sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity were won through a war of independence under very difficult conditions. Therefore, Turkey has been extremely sensitive to these issues.

After the War of Independence against the West, Turkey did not follow an anti-Western policy. On the contrary, a Western-style nation-state was built, and radical social reforms were carried out. This radical change at home required a peaceful and stable international environment abroad. For this reason, internal threat perceptions were at least as important as external threats. The consolidation of the new political regime has been the main target. Protecting the secular character of this regime and ensuring national integrity has been the most important internal security problem of Turkey. Regime security has been among the most controversial political issues throughout the history of the Republic.

The balanced policy between the great powers is one of the most important dimensions of the security policies of the Atatürk period. Starting from the Ottoman period to the Republic period, Turkey tries to balance one great power that poses a threat to itself with another great power. Turkey, which conflicted with Western countries in the War of Independence, saw the Soviet Union as a balancing power. However, cooperation with the Soviet Union had a pragmatic and temporary character.

The rise of the Italian threat in the 1930s brought Turkey closer to Britain and France. The resolution of the problems left unresolved by the Treaty of Lausanne and the deterioration of relations with the Soviets at the end of the 1930s led Turkey to the West. In other words, Western-oriented foreign policy was established in this period. This orientation continued after the Second World War. Although Turkey's relations with its Western allies have become more complex, it is still not possible to say that this orientation has changed today.

Turkey's status quo based and defensive foreign policy tradition was also consolidated during the early republic period. The need to protect the gains achieved by the Lausanne Peace Treaty and the reforms carried out at home forced Turkey to adopt a status quo policy. This tradition points to an intense security agenda, and it can turn into a skeptical approach to the international environment that is called the Sèvres Syndrome. Often, the fo-

reign policy itself becomes a securitized issue. The reason for this situation lies in the historical experiences of Turkey.

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