

# Navigating the Tides of Change: Turkey's Quest for United Nations Membership and the New World Order

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## Abstract

This paper aims to shed light into Turkey's political and diplomatic history by focusing on its efforts to join the United Nations (UN). The search for a new political system in Turkey coincided with the global quest for a new world order, initiated by the UN's four founding members during the Second World War. After a brief discussion on the making of the UN and its predecessors, the paper delves into Turkey's position during the war, followed by an analysis of the ruling elites' perceptions as reflected in parliamentary debates and the contemporary national press coverage. Furthermore, the paper evaluates the influence of UN membership on the emergence of a multi-party system in Turkey and discusses how and why the change of the global political climate contributed to the transformation of the Turkish political system.

**Keywords:** United Nations, New World Order, Modern Turkish History, Turkish Political Elites, The Second World War

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## Introduction

The world order established in 1945 is in deep crisis. The very institutions, ideologies, and economic systems that underpinned this order, along with the balance of power and the influence of its hegemonic generation, the baby boomers, appear to be either in decline or seriously challenged. Yet, there remains a conspicuous absence of consensus on the nature of the new order that will emerge. The principal four architects of the world order of 1945, the United States (US), Britain, Russia and China, are all in deep crisis and for long have been preoccupied with their own problems and are unable to articulate a cohesive global vision as they once did. The telltale signs of collapse are everywhere: the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the waning appeal of the globalist discourse, the aging of so many populations, the pressing ecological problems, the accelerating generational divide, the radical changes in the workplace, communications and last, but not least, the rise artificial intelligence (AI), a

potential technological turning point in human evolution. Last but not least, Trump's rise to power in the US has dramatically accelerated existing trends towards a turbulent interregnum and significantly altered the landscape of global politics.

Perhaps it is now time to remember the world of 1945, when optimism for a new world order prevailed and efforts to create a global institution, the (UN), eventually succeeded despite its inherent shortcomings. This paper endeavors to illuminate the nexus of the global and local by casting a spotlight on the narrative of a founding member, Turkey, whose journey to UN membership offers a wealth of insights, not only for the Turkish elites, but also for the foundation of the UN itself. Moreover, the fears, anxieties, visions and expectations the ruling elites had about the UN reveal how they perceived Turkey's place in the world and how they legitimized their own political projections about Turkish politics. Of particular interest in this regard are the competing visions of how the country's political system could be transformed through the introduction of a multi-party system which could seemingly be in line with the spirit of the times, namely the so-called "liberal world order". Despite the importance of the political history of Turkey's UN membership, there are surprisingly few scholarly works focusing exclusively on this topic, especially in English. This paper aims to make a contribution in this respect as well.

We first intend to discuss Turkey's position during the war that was full of paradoxes in the sense that while the ruling elites desperately sought to stay out of the war, they also wanted Turkey to be part of the emerging new world order envisioned by the Allies who, however, insisted on Turkey's entry into the war. This paradox leads us to an investigation of the perceptions of the ruling elites that will be elaborated in detail as reflected in the discussions in the Turkish Grand National Assembly and in the national press of the time. Of particular importance to our intellectual inquiry is the impact of the UN process on Turkish politics, the role played in this process by the fears, concerns, expectations and hopes of the ruling elites and an analysis of their overall realist assessments of the nature of this organization.

## **The Road to the United Nations**

The UN was certainly not the first attempt in history to conceive a global order. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the League of Nations in 1920 were all examples in history for establishing a sustainable and universal world order. The most recent predecessor to the UN, the League of Nations, an embodiment of the US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, failed just like the ones before them. This was partly due to prevailing isolationist tendencies in the US Congress, and partly due to the extreme nationalisms of the inter-war years (Barlas 2017: 95-97). Towards the end of the Second World War, the US, now militarily and economically more powerful than ever, felt the need to assert its presence in global affairs by devising a new world order.

The full integration of the US into the international system in the context of the unfolding global conflict, was assured through a series of meetings among the Allied states during the

war. The initial impetus was triggered by a meeting on a battleship in August 1941 between the US president and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, respectively. The two nations signed the Atlantic Charter at this encounter, outlining their respective visions for a viable international security apparatus. Only four months later, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the British Dominions, and the exiled Western European governments endorsed the Charter, thus placing the concept of a post-war international order on the agenda as early as 1941 (Cumhuriyet 1941; Baehr and Gordenker 2005: 15). In 1942, another conference took place in Washington DC, where twenty-six nations, including now China, committed to collaborating on security issues. Similarly, the Moscow Conference in late 1943 saw signatories announce their intention to establish an international organization dedicated to the maintenance of world peace (Wilson 1952: 22-23). This sentiment was echoed during the Tehran Conference in December 1943, attended by Roosevelt, Churchill, and their Soviet counterpart, Joseph Stalin.

While the USSR participated in these discussions, in fact the impetus for an international organization came from the US and Britain. These two powers took the lead in shaping the organization and its associated institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which became the cornerstones of the Bretton Woods System in 1944 (Hasgüler and Uludağ 2012: 94; Plesch and Weiss 2015: 199). This system, endorsed by forty-four countries, including Turkey and the USSR, set the stage for a new world order. Alongside these efforts, the US and Britain persistently underscored the need for the establishment of a “liberal world order”. In this context, one problem was the USSR, but Roosevelt always believed that Russians could also be incorporated into a global system of security which could be seen as “an essential condition for sustained American participation in world affairs. Without it, American opinion would see only a return to traditional balance-of-power and sphere-of-influence diplomacy and little hope for a cooperative, peaceful world” (Dallek 1995: 508). The Soviet leaders’ pragmatic attitudes also paid off in this context since at the time they were desperately looking to secure world peace. The negotiations held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1944 and later in Yalta in 1945 marked the final stages in the creation of the UN. The most contentious issue during these discussions was the veto power afforded to the five permanent members, a matter that sparked controversy in numerous countries, including Turkey. Despite these debates, 51 countries that had declared war against the Axis powers before March 1, 1945, were invited to sign the UN Charter on June 26, 1945 (Gönlübol 1975: 176-181; Luard 1982; Bailey 1989: 13; Denk 2015: 131-147; Gök 2016: 295).

## Turkey on the Road to the UN Membership

The Turkish experience of joining the UN took place in this historical context. This experience, in turn, however, provides invaluable insights for understanding the UN in a global context within its specific historical conjuncture. To achieve this, it is necessary to assess the political perceptions of the Turkish elites based on Turkey’s place in the international system during the war. The foremost concern in this regard was the fear of the Soviet Union. When the

Soviets demanded in 1939 the right to control the straits as a condition for renewing the 1925 Treaty of Friendship, this became a matter of serious concern and apprehension for the Turkish elites (Lenczowski 1962: 135-137) who had developed a cautious attitude toward the USSR (Aydoğdu 2022: 94-95). This was partly related to the wartime demands of the Soviets regarding the control of the straits. On the other hand, at the Moscow Conference in 1943, the USSR demanded that Turkey be forced to participate in the war as a combatant state if necessary. According to the Soviets, Turkey needed to pay the price for attending the post-war peace conference by joining the war (Aydemir 2011: 262-286). In March 1945, the USSR unilaterally annulled the 1925 Turkish-Soviet non-aggression pact (Cumhuriyet 1945a). Likewise, at the Potsdam Conference, Soviet demands regarding the straits and certain territories in northeastern Turkey became clearer. These developments further justified the mistrust of Turkish political elites (Aydemir 2011: 284). Therefore, the Soviet revisionist foreign policy became a concern for the Turkish elites including President İsmet İnönü who pursued a balanced policy towards the USSR which was to play a significant role in defeating the Axis armies and ultimately shaped the new world order after the war with the other great powers (Weisband 1974: 171-174). It is thus no coincidence that Churchill presented the UN project to the Turkish elites as a preventive measure against a potential Soviet invasion following the war (Aydemir 2011: 260-261).

Turkey's relations with the Western countries, however, were also problematic because of its active policy of neutrality which required an uneasy balance with the major world powers (Weinberg 1995: 398-399; Balcı 2017: 75-77). This unease originated from the Western powers' pressure on Turkey to join the war on their side. Furthermore, Turkey's substantial trade relations with Germany raised serious concerns. Consequently, in April 1944, the Allied powers forced Turkey to sever its economic ties with Germany (Weisband 1974: 127). In addition, Roosevelt strongly criticized Turkey for allowing several German ships, disguised as merchant vessels but carrying military equipment, to pass through the straits. In response to this issue, the British gave a note to Turkey, and the Soviets informed the American government that Turkey's demands would not be met at the end of the war. Following these developments, at the request of the American government, Turkey broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on August 2, 1944 (Deringil 2014: 251-252). Therefore the policies that could hinder Turkey's integration into the new order were abandoned. For this reason, President İnönü articulated his goals at the opening session of the legislative year in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 1, 1944:

“We believe that the great powers will be able to work together to establish a new order that will protect the independence and security of nations. Turkey will make every effort to be a useful and helpful member of the family of nations” (Cihan and Karapınar 1993: 51).

The Turkish political elites were closely monitoring the developments and decisions made in the conferences held after the end of the war. In fact, the conditions for participation in the

San Francisco conference, which would be determined by the founding members of the UN, were announced at the Yalta conference (Türkiye Dış Politikasında 50 Yıl 1973: 243; Koçak 2013: 272). There, it was agreed that a precondition for a country like Turkey to join the UN was to declare war on the Axis powers by a specific date. Accordingly, in February 1945, Turkey declared war on Germany and Japan and soon after signed the UN Charter adopted in 1942 (TDA 1945a). Despite all the negative expectations about Soviet pressure, Turkey was among the 39 countries officially invited (Karabulut 2007: 66-67) to the San Francisco Conference on March 5, 1945 by the founding members (TDA 1945b; TDA 1945c; Kasalak 1998: 210-233). All these developments apparently contributed to Turkey's acceptance to the emerging new world order and one could argue that her realist wartime efforts paid off in achieving her goals.

At the San Francisco conference, Turkey was represented by a delegation of eighteen people (Yalman 1945: 110-116). Those who signed the treaty were Hasan Saka, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; Hüseyin Ragıp Baydur, the Ambassador to Washington and Feridun Cemal Erkin, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The UN Charter was overwhelmingly ratified on September 28, 1945, by the votes of 455 assembly members during the meeting. The relevant document was then handed over to the depositary state, the US. Consequently, with the ratification of the treaty in their domestic laws by 24 states, including Turkey, the UN Charter entered into force on October 24, 1945 (TDA 1945d; Ata 2014: 261). Turkey's membership in the UN strengthened its international standing compared to pro-Axis countries like Spain, Portugal, and Switzerland, which were denied access by the USSR. The Soviets, however, only reluctantly accepted Turkey's entrance (Byrnes 1945: 63-64; Roosevelt n.d.: 149; Barutçu 1977: 280-281) because of her late entry into the war. In fact, in the beginning of the conference, Turkey's late entry was argued to be problematic, but as Foreign Minister Saka later stated, the Turkish delegate was able to change this perception thanks to their intensive lobbying there (TDA 1945e).

For the ratification of the UN treaty in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (BCA 1945), extensive discussions took place about the nature of the UN and Turkey's position as a member. According to Foreign Minister Saka, the text of the treaty was more comprehensive than the draft presented at Dumbarton Oaks. Ultimately, he added, the existence of an international organization capable of preventing the outbreak of wars was considered highly valuable (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 156). Similarly, Erzurum deputy Nakiye Elgün emphasized that all states should act according to the consensus reached in the Atlantic Pact, Dumbarton Oaks, and San Francisco conferences (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 161).

While the UN treaty was being ratified in the Turkish Assembly, discussions about the new organization's mechanism were made on the basis of comparisons with the League of Nations. In this respect, Hikmet Bayur, the Manisa deputy at the time, noted that while the former was almost forced upon the major states by Wilson, the situation with the UN was different. Indeed, after long and destructive war years, many states, large and small, recognized the necessity of such an organization (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 169-170). In addition, the League had proven inadequate in practice and had become worn out. Moreover, its stance on the

Mosul question in the 1920s caused frustration in Turkey, leading many people to approach the institution with great suspicion. This was also reinforced by emphasizing that the Turkish War of Independence succeeded against the founding members of the League (Turkey and the United Nations 1961: 7-9). The UN, however, represented both a new chapter in terms of state security and was equipped with a mechanism much more advanced than the League. Most importantly, the UN, many deputies pointed out, was endowed with greater power and responsibility to maintain world peace (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 157).

Yavuz Abadan Unat, for example, contended that the UN was a more universal and inclusive organization, as all major nations, particularly the US, would actively participate. Unlike the League, the UN's council would operate continuously. Unat believed that economic challenges and social inequality were significant factors contributing to wars. He thought that the establishment of the Economic and Social Council within the UN would increase the likelihood of addressing such issues. Unlike the League, rather than merely suppressing wars, the UN aimed to eliminate first the factors that caused wars (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 161-162). Similarly, Adnan Menderes, a prominent opposition politician of the time, noted that the connection between the Economic and Social Council and the organizations formed through the Bretton Woods system would deter hostilities between nations and mend strained relationships (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 170).

## The UN Membership and the Political System

During parliamentary speeches (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 161), one of the most emphasized themes that soon made a notable contribution to regime change in Turkey was the belief that the UN treaty paved the way for more democracy. Nakiye Elgün, for instance, asserted that democracy and freedom had triumphed after the war, particularly thanks to Roosevelt, whom she credited for enabling this (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 160). Another deputy, Rasih Kaplan, argued that the UN resulted from US and British plans to establish democracy around the world through an international organization model, which he saw as beneficial for all states (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 157). As Zekeriya Sertel (1945) pointed out “the United Nations Charter contains provisions that concern not only external affairs, but also the internal affairs of each country”. Nadir Nadi (1945a) announced the end of the war as “the unconditional triumph of democracies”. As seen in many speeches and writings of the time, the influence of the political climate stimulated by a sense of an emerging new world order pushed Turkey to gradually prioritize domestic democratic developments.

Therefore, it is not surprising to see a return to political pluralism as an important promise made by Turkey in San Francisco (Son Posta 1943). In a statement made during the conference, Foreign Minister Saka stated that democracy in Turkey was in its development phase (Akşam 1945a). In fact, even as early as 1943, President İnönü signalled to the Allies his intent to broaden political participation and to reinforce the rule of law in Turkey. This can be



seen in the amnesty he introduced regarding the abolition of the Wealth Tax<sup>1</sup> before attending the Cairo summit in 1943. Later in May 1945, İnönü discussed the importance of the people's will being represented in the Turkish Assembly. According to him, Turkish democracy was in progress and would further develop once the war's shadow had dissipated (Akşam 1945b; Şatiroğlu 2006: 31-32). Likewise Adnan Menderes in the Assembly argued that any form of government other than democracy could jeopardize peace by enabling aggressive authoritarian states, as exemplified by Italy and Germany. The UN treaty also covered the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, such as political rights, he believed. Thus, the UN should play a positive role in member countries' transformation toward democracy. Menderes also noted that the compatibility of the UN and Turkish constitutions would positively impact Turkey's democratic development (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 170-171; Koçak 2010: 587). This emphasis on the compatibility of the UN Charter, in fact, was a common theme shared by many of the Turkish elites of the time. Interestingly, Menderes and many others based their demand for political pluralism in domestic politics entirely on such an argumentation (Cumhuriyet 1945g):

“Since what the UN Charter requires, and what the nations participating in it pledge and accept, is the supremacy of the national will through the freedom of voting, we are relieved to see that the elimination of the obstacles hindering the supremacy of the national will in any country, if any, strengthens the freedom and independence of nations” (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 171).

Interestingly, Menderes' speech using the UN as a leverage for political pluralism was harshly criticized by the ruling People's Republican Party deputies. Apparently, the UN issue from the outset rapidly became an issue for domestic politics although the UN Charter itself did not indeed include blueprints for domestic politics at all despite the claims of the opponents such as Menderes. As is often the case, imaginations and perceptions can be more important than realities.

In the same vein, people like Falih Rıfkı Atay (1945), the editor-in-chief of the semi-official newspaper *Ulus* and one of the politicians of the time, regarded the Atlantic Charter as the embodiment of “the mission of the democracies against the Nazi and fascist new world order which disregarded national liberties and international law”. Similarly, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın (1945) viewed the Atlantic declaration a “guideline” that should not remain solely in words, but instead become the foundation of Turkey's legal system. He argued that in the eyes of the ruling elites of the time Turkey's place in the UN had already secured in their imagination, if not yet in practise (Yalçın 1945). Turkey's entry into the UN, he continued, was in the nation's interest, because after the Yalta conference, Roosevelt made it clear that there would be no more wars in the future thanks to the mechanisms established to secure peace (Akşam 1945c).

1 The *Varlık Vergisi* (Wealth Tax), imposed in Turkey in 1942, disproportionately targeted non-Muslim minorities with exorbitant levies, leading to economic ruin for many. Those unable to pay were sent to forced labor camps, and the tax was abolished in 1944 amid widespread criticism (Aktar 2001).

It is no coincidence that it was during the San Francisco conference that the four leading opposition leaders, Celal Bayar, Adnan Menderes, Fuat Köprülü, and Refik Koraltan, issued a memorandum calling for the strengthening of liberal rights in Turkey (Cumhuriyet 1945b; Cumhuriyet 1945c; Cumhuriyet 1945d). This memorandum turned out to be a watershed in the historiography of Turkey's return to multi-party politics. Emphasizing that the Republic was already founded on democratic principles, President İnönü stated in November 1945 that Turkey's most significant shortcoming was the absence of an opposition party (Cumhuriyet 1945a). Accordingly, about a month later, he met with the leader of the newly established Democratic Party, Celal Bayar (Cumhuriyet 1945e). Given the historical context within which all these developments took place, the UN treaty apparently influenced Turkey's domestic political system with regard to the democratization of the regime despite the central and primary role played out by the domestic factors.<sup>2</sup>

## The Reluctant Acceptance of the Veto Power

The Turkish membership in the UN was generally well-received in parliament. However, the parliament members also noted shortcomings in the UN treaty that required improvement over time. The most frequently mentioned shortcoming was the veto power of the UN Security Council's (UNSC) permanent members (TDA 1945f). Although Foreign Minister Saka assured the Assembly of the promise made in San Francisco that states with veto rights would not abuse these rights, numerous objections were raised in parliament (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 160). Some deputies emphasized that world peace was left to the discretion of the permanent council members (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 162). Mümtaz Ökmen, for instance, contended that the Security Council's intentions and actions concerning granting veto power to powerful states contradicted the UN's core philosophy. Similarly, Recep Peker referred to the permanent members' veto rights as a "wound" in the UN treaty. According to him, if an aggressor state were among these five members, the council would not function properly.

Likewise, the deputies warned about situations when aggressor states maintain good relations with one of the five permanent members, as the council members may be reluctant to vote against such a country. Historical evidence demonstrates that close US-Israeli relations often exemplify this issue. Indeed, the US has blocked the council from imposing sanctions on Israel numerous times following Arab-Israeli conflicts during the Cold War. Consequently, in such instances, the UNSC becomes ineffective, and the UN's objective of ensuring collective security remains unattainable. Addressing this problem was not only in Turkey's interest at that time, but also a necessity to reaffirm alignment with the UN's founding purpose. Interestingly, however, a prominent member of the ruling party, Recep Peker mentioned that Turkey did not sufficiently oppose this situation when the permanent members obtained their veto rights (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 171-173).

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2 Despite the impact of the global winds of change towards democracy, the Turkish experience owes much to the domestic social factors. For an emphasis on domestic dynamics see (Karaömerlioğlu 2006: 89-107).



This was perhaps because Turkey, as stated by Foreign Minister Saka, did not strongly object to the veto power of the five major states in San Francisco. This was corroborated by another conference delegation member, Feridun Cemal Erkin, who acknowledged Turkey's uneasiness regarding the veto issue. Turkey did not want this matter to become an obstacle to the UN's establishment, so the Turkish delegate reluctantly approved the right, hoping the great powers would use it responsibly. Nevertheless, the Turkish delegation called for increasing the number of temporary memberships in the Security Council,<sup>3</sup> potentially achieving a balance within the council (Erkin 1987: 151-152). As a result of objections from small states like Turkey on various issues, significant changes were made to the draft agreement.<sup>4</sup> However, the objection to the veto power of permanent members did not alter the outcome (TDA 1945g). The Turkish elites, like Hikmet Bayur, repeatedly emphasized that many small states contributed to winning the war, but were not adequately recognized in San Francisco. Bayur proposed that larger states should have limited votes and that each state should vote according to its strength and demographic size to achieve equality. This was how equality could be achieved. Despite these suggestions, he did not oppose the Treaty's ratification (TBMM Tutanak 1945: 167-170). Similarly, one of the leading Turkish delegate members Feridun Erkin regarded the UN Treaty's implementation as a success, albeit with the hope that the US and the Soviet Union would maintain a harmonious relationship in the future (1987: 153). In summary, from the political elites' perspective, the existence of such an international organization was considered valuable despite the Treaty's inherent shortcomings. Understandably, in their realistic viewpoint as summarized by Saka, "the existence of such an organization was preferable to its non-existence" (Kumaş and Doğanay 1998: 9). To gain a fuller understanding of the Turkish elites' views on this and other significant matters, we now need to examine the reflections regarding the UN in the Turkish press.

## The UN Controversy in the Turkish Press

Despite the Turkish government's strict control over the press during the Second World War, competing visions of a new world order remained a matter of concern for both supporters and opponents of the two warring camps until the course of the war became clear. On the one hand, the Germans were making huge efforts to disseminate their own propaganda through the Turkish press (Glasneck n.d.: 24-25). The key figures in the propaganda effort included many former high-ranking members of the Turkish army who had been trained in an educational system dominated by the Prussian military tradition (Özyüksel 2004: 11-12). Among them are Ali İhsan Sâbis (1941) and Hüseyin Emir Erkilet (1942) who shared their military perspectives and future projections based on the belief that the Axis powers

3 An increase in the number of provisional members of the Security Council took place in 1965. When the Security Council was first established, it had 5 permanent and 6 temporary members. In 1965, these numbers were updated to 5 permanent and 10 temporary members and took their current form. See (Vakit 1945).

4 For more detailed information on some of the arrangements requested by the Turkish delegation at the conference see (Cumhuriyet 1945f; Gönübol 1963: 3).

would win the war. Civilian authors of such newspapers expressed similar views as well. For example, Nevzad Güven (1942), a writer for *Tasviri Efkar*, could find the German propaganda minister Göebbels extremely appealing. In 1942, Güven had already characterized Germany as a power that assumed “a formidable and challenging role in determining the future world order” (Güven 1942).

On the other hand, majority of the writers in the Turkish press were advocates of the Allies who directed significant criticisms towards the pro-German camp. One leading journalist in this camp, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın, criticized the prominent *Cumhuriyet* writer Nadir Nadi for his support to the Axis powers because the latter pointed out that after the war the new world order could only be achieved by Germany. This notion, of course, was predicated on the belief that Germany could win the war and reflected Nadi’s own political stance regarding the conflict. He believed that although Turkey had alliance agreements with Britain and France, in terms of Realpolitik, it had to pay attention to the balance of power in the war and had to be careful not to antagonize the Axis countries. In fact, Nadi was implicitly criticizing the Allies’ supporters in the Turkish press, who viewed the Axis Powers as enemies (Nadi 1940; Erer 1965: 80,85). The state authorities saw the polemic between Yalçın and Nadi as a threat to Turkish foreign policy and used Nadi’s articles as a pretext to close the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper for three months in 1940.

When Japan entered the war, the Turkish government decided to reinforce neutrality in the conflict which now had acquired a global dimension (Vakit 1941). Subsequently, the Allies’ supporters in the Turkish press maintained their unwavering support on two issues until the UN was established: an increasing emphasis on Turkey’s neutrality and support for the idea of establishing a new world order, especially given that such a process was already underway due to the Atlantic declaration. Necmeddin Sadak (1944), an influential academician and journalist of the time, criticized German propaganda minister Göebbels for his plans to create a superior race, arguing that a new world order should be established through the cooperation of nations rather than the domination of a single nation. Similarly, another writer of the period, Sabiha Sertel (1945), hoped for and predicted a new order which would be “a union of nations that trust each other, grant each nation the right to live independently, and enable economic, social and political agreements with other nations that can create a world of peace”.

As the course of the war became clearer and the Mussolini government was overthrown in Italy, people like Sadak re-evaluated Turkey’s position of neutrality. He contended that a peace order should be established in Europe after the war, without distinguishing between large and small states, and that Turkey should take its place in this order (Sadak 1943). In the same vein, Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın (1943) saw Turkey as an “oasis of peace” amidst the war. Turkey’s declaration of war on the Axis powers towards the end of the war was presented to the readers as an indication of Turkey’s entry to the UN. Armed neutrality, he argued, was over. Likewise, the pro-Allies newspaper writers of the time began to envision the UN process as a catalyst for establishing democratic political regimes based on the rule of law (Abadan 1945).

In this context, references to the beginning of a new world order were frequently made. Not surprisingly, professor Cemil Bilsel (1994a, 1944b, 1944c, 1944d, 1944e, 1944f), who later became a member of the Turkish delegate in San Francisco, published a series of articles in 1944 all entitled “while the new world order is being established”.

These were all elusive dreams, reminiscent of Woodrow Wilson’s optimism of the early 1920s, however. The San Francisco conference would prove to be a process in which this optimism was shattered for the Turkish press. Here the most significant impasse in establishing a new world order was related to the nature of the relationship between big and small states. About a month before the San Francisco conference convened, when asked in the House of Commons, Churchill responded to a question on how to establish the relationship between small and big states: “Well, there is a difference between the big and the small, the strong and the weak in the world. One can only decry this.” Churchill’s perspective, in a sense, legitimized the relations to be established in the new order between big and small states. This meant that due to the nature of the new world order to be established, there could be no equality between states (Akşam 1945d). While arguing as such, he nonetheless mentioned the assurance given to the Turkish Foreign Minister and others in San Francisco. According to Churchill, the big veto-wielding states in the UN would not become dictators (Son Posta 1945).

Such an assurance, however, was not sufficient to convince the Turkish elites. Sadak (1945), for example, insisted that an order in which the great powers were privileged would mean the continuation of the League of Nations system. Another writer of the period, Refik Halid Karay (1945), with reference to Churchill’s statement on the role of big and small states, contended that those who still had any expectations from San Francisco, and thus from the new world order, would be disappointed. Despite all these criticisms and reservations, however, the establishment of the UN as a result of the San Francisco summit and Turkey’s membership in this organization were, by and large, mostly welcomed by the press.

These positive attitudes echoed in many of the writings of the elites of the time. In this respect, Sadak (1945a) argued that although the hopes for the conference did not fully materialize, “a conscience of nations that would at least regard the action of a state as a disgrace was formed” within the UNSC. This, despite everything, was believed to be a good start (Sadak 1945b). In the same vein, Nadi underscored that democracy in Turkey is now “San Francisco branded” (Yetkin 1983: 252) and many difficulties could be overcome as long as there was cooperation between the major powers (Nadi 1945). Sure there were some others, like Hüseyin Cahid Yalçın (1945a), who were not actually impressed by the optimism of many. Although the San Francisco conference in essence aimed to achieve good things, the mechanism to prevent a third world war had not yet been established (Yalçın 1945a). The *Vakit* newspaper writer Asım Us (1945) likewise welcomed the positive efforts in San Francisco, but stated that only 40 percent of the problems could be solved with the veto issue being concluded in favor of the big states, and thus a possible war could not be prevented again.

Another prominent journalist of the time, Zekeriya Sertel (1945), appreciated the fact that democratic regimes triumphed against Nazism and considered the existence of the UN as a guarantee for human rights. For him, Turkey's membership in this organization would make it necessary to implement democracy in Turkey and would end the so-called "National Chief" period. Ahmet Emin Yalman (1945), another influential journalist of the period, who was also present at the conference, was perhaps the person who came up with the harshest criticism of the establishment of the UN in this way. Only fancy words, he argued, were used in San Francisco and a regime of disorder similar to the order proposed by the Axis powers was actually established. Small states were summoned to the conference only to approve this disorder established by the major ones. According to him, there was no agreement. For it to happen, the dominance of the major states in the organization should last only for a temporary period until the system was settled. In fact, Yalman himself at the time offered a reasonable proposal to this acute problem (Yalman 1945: 125; Gürkan 1993: 275-281). The purpose of the UN, he believed, was, indeed, not to abandon arms and to establish security through a common law enforcement agency. On the contrary, it was envisaged that only the great powers with weapons would ensure security jointly. In the meantime, the arms race would continue, and the war-defeated states would eventually be able to take up arms. In short, the new regulation was not intended to destroy armament, but to regulate it (Yalman 1945: 97-98).

This issue of asymmetrical power continued to haunt the Turkish elites. Burhan Belge (1945), for example, warned that the fate of the UN should not be similar to that of the League. Therefore, he proposed that the power of the major states in the UNSC should be increased so that they could exhibit their executive characteristics, but that this power should not be given to them in the form of privileges (Belge 1945). In his article addressing the same issue, Falih Rıfkı Atay (1946) wrote that it was a pessimistic point of view to think that the UN was only in the interest of powerful states. To him, a small state faced with a veto would not lose its right. The General Assembly, formed by many different states, was in fact a world plebiscite center. Atay (1946) thought that at the time, no great power could tolerate the creation of an agenda against it in the General Assembly and despite the shortcomings found the symbolic importance of the General Assembly valuable.

One can of course test the relevance of all these comments on the nature of the UN as questioned by the Turkish political elites by looking at some experiences in the first UN General Assembly meeting and at some international disputes of the time. After the war, Iran demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from its country; Russia and Ukraine also applied to the UNSC for the withdrawal of British forces from Indonesia and Greece. Likewise, Syria and Lebanon were among the countries that appealed to the Council for the withdrawal of foreign forces from their lands (Emeç 1946). These disagreements were among the UN's first experiences.

This theme was taken up by many such as Nihat Erim who was also one of the prominent politicians of the time. Erim (1946) argued that one of the reasons why a definitive decision

could not be reached on the issues about Iran, Indonesia and Greece was the looming threat of the veto right like the “Sword of Damocles”. In fact, one could welcome the fact that the veto power was not used by the Soviets and the British in these matters, representing a step towards negotiation or other forms of resolution. In the case of Syria and Lebanon, however, the American resolution was met with a Soviet veto, preventing any decision for a solution (Erim 1946). As long as the great powers possess the right to veto, the journalist Asım Us (1946) wrote, such consequences will frequently occur. These shortcomings actually paved the way for increased diplomatic and political tensions as the Cold War unfolded, since crucial disagreements between the great powers have never ceased to exist.

## Conclusion

Turkey’s experience of joining the UN provides valuable insights into the UN’s formation and its significant impact on Turkish politics after the Second World War. The high expectations and hopes that the UN inspired were palpable among the Turkish populace. They yearned for a better world order, one that would put an end to the chaos, uncertainty, and extremism that had plagued global politics since 1914 (Turkey and the United Nations 1961: 79). Nonetheless, the Turkish elites had serious doubts about the potential shortcomings of the UN project, as exemplified by discussions surrounding the veto power of permanent members and the controversial role of small and large powers in world affairs. Many contemporary commentators astutely assessed the UN’s strengths and weaknesses, and despite the challenges that emerged within the first year of its founding, they generally believed that the organization’s positive aspects outweighed the negatives. Optimism about the cooperation between great powers prevailed against the possible disputes and confrontations that would soon emerge in the context of the Cold War (Rivlin 1995: 81-104).

The fact that virtually everyone in Turkey felt that staying away from the UN experience was unthinkable speaks to the country’s engagement with this new world order. From the outset, the Turkish elites identified the UN as crucial for establishing a new world order in which Turkey had to be actively involved. It is quite intriguing that, in Turkey, both Axis and Allied supporters initially approached UN-related issues within the context of forming a new world order. As was the case in other countries, this was certainly a significant character of the *Zeitgeist* of the era.

The UN experience and the way the Turkish elites perceived it indicate that it was the US and the British which were the real powers behind the emerging world order of the time despite the fact that the Soviet Union was critical in winning the war, and thus emerged as an influential force in world politics by 1945. Indeed, while the Soviets were effective in blocking the membership of the countries close to Germany such as Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, a country like Turkey, which had tense relations with the USSR during the war, was still able to secure membership (Houston 1952: 683-709). As previously discussed, the Turkish elites viewed this membership also as a way to protect themselves against the Soviet Union. In fact,

they were well aware that joining the UN signified the deepening of the relations with the West. Despite their diverse political views and cultural orientations, there was a broad consensus among the Turkish elites to align with the West. Interestingly, this differs significantly from the current ruling political elites, led by President Erdoğan, who has envisioned Turkey's future as being rooted in the Middle East. As opposed to the consensus reached in 1945, the Turkish elites now find themselves deeply divided over their nation's future direction.

Many scholars have labeled the post-1945 era as the "liberal" world order. This characterization is understandable, considering the anxieties of the US and Britain regarding fascistic single-party regimes during that time. Although with the coming of the Cold War constraints, the Western powers did not consider the rise of liberal democracy as their priority and instead were preoccupied with a powerful coalition building against the Soviet Union. However, this was not actually the case in the year 1945. Interestingly, from Spain to Portugal, from almost all Latin American countries to Turkey, almost everywhere the year 1945 witnessed the call for political reforms toward democracy (Bowen 2006: 90-91; Koçak 2010: 867-913; Gallagher 2020: 139-142). As presented above, the Turkish case is a convincing testimony to the existence among the elites of a demand for broadening democratic politics because of the sense of a new era as embodied in the UN. Our study on the Turkish experience makes it clear that the winds of change inspired by the UN that became an integral part of the *Zeitgeist* of the era contributed to gradual regime changes in many countries. In this context, we can argue that while domestic social and political factors first and foremost contributed to Turkey's return to multi-party democracy, the political climate of the year 1945 certainly acted as a catalyst for broadening political participation.

The age-old historiographical debate on the "external factor" in Turkey's shift to multi-party politics can now be better understood as the outcome of a radical political mood change of the intelligentsia. It was this new political climate of 1945 that was the "external factor". Similar things happened in many other countries, but in Turkey the new mood endured and even consolidated in the coming years as opposed to the reconsolidation of the single-party regimes in many other countries such as Spain and Portugal. Many historians have pointed out the political pressures of the US and Britain as the "external factor", but these countries actually never imposed any kind of political pressure whatsoever as far as Turkey's political regime was concerned. True, the Soviet threat was a factor for Turkey's siding with the West, but this was not an "external factor" for political pluralism. It was the sense and expectation of a global change of the political climate in 1945 that was one of the catalysts for the transformation of the political system in Turkey.

In the making of the UN, the problems inherent in the League of Nations were taken into account in great detail as exemplified in the case of the Turkish elites. In the near future, we may anticipate encountering a similar period of scrutiny regarding the UN, as the so-called "liberal world order" established in 1945 disintegrates and the uncertainty surrounding the potential foundations of the subsequent order remains.



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