

The United States, Turkey, and the Search for Collective Security, 1945-1948

DR. IAN ONA JOHNSON

The Ohio State University, Ph.D. in History

*Yale University, Associate Director of the Brady-Johnson
Program in Grand Strategy*



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Abstract

During the Second World War, the Roosevelt Administration proposed a global military force for the future United Nations Organization. This army, drawn from the militaries of the five “veto” powers, would function under the UN Security Council, deploying to counter aggression around the world. Negotiations began in February 1946 in New York.

Simultaneously, a crisis developed between Turkey and the Soviet Union over the Turkish Straits. This challenge to the international order proved a critical testing ground for the UN. The failure of the UN Security Council and its planned army to constrain Soviet behavior began to shift American strategy away from collective security towards a network of regional alliances, most prominently in the form of NATO. This paper analyzes that shift - from collective security to collective defense - through the prism of the Turkish crisis after the Second World War.

1944

1945
March

USSR renounces Treaty of Friendship with Turkey, allowing it to lapse on November 7, 1945

1944

August and September

USSR occupies Romania and, later, Bulgaria



1945
June

Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov demands revision of the Montreux Treaty, as well as having Soviet bases in the straits and the handover of several of Turkey's eastern provinces to USSR

1945

April to June

San Francisco Conference (The United Nations Conference on International Organization)



1945

July and August

Potsdam Conference

1945
November

Stalin begins setting up a puppet state in Northwestern Iran

1946

February

Diplomat George F. Kennan in the Moscow Embassy pens his famous long telegram, while the UN Military Staff Committee holds its first session in New York



1946
April 6

USS Missouri, one of the flagship battleships in the US Fleet, arrives in Istanbul with the remains of the Turkish Ambassador Münir Ertegün

1946

June

US Navy begins to patrol the Eastern Mediterranean

1946
August 19

US Secretary of State Dean Acheson warns USSR against attacking Turkey

1946

September

President Truman dispatches supercarrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt to the Eastern Mediterranean

1947
March

Treaty of Dunkirk

1948
March

Brussels Pact



1949
April 4

Twelve founding members of NATO sign the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C.

1947

June

Secretary of State George C. Marshall delivers a speech at Harvard, calling for broad US aid to reconstruct Europe. This is the first step towards the Marshall Plan



1949

1. Introduction

As the Second World War reached its bloody crescendo, Allied leaders contemplated how to prevent such a cataclysm from ever occurring again. In this spirit, US President Franklin Roosevelt spearheaded proposals for a new international organization. To avoid the pitfalls that had wrecked the League of Nations, the new body would be armed with an “Army of Peace”: a permanent, ready military force comprised of components from its leading member states, aimed at deterring aggression around the world. That enormously ambitious plan defined Roosevelt’s grand strategy for engaging the post-war world; it was adopted by President Harry Truman in his first year in office, as well. This paper explores how that project grew, fell apart and, in the process, impacted both American and Turkish national strategies.

Generally, historical analyses have focused on the efforts of internationalists to maximize the effectiveness of the United Nations, or explored the efforts of the United States and USSR to build their own alliance systems in the context of the early Cold War. Occasionally, the two literatures have been connected, but usually, only within the context of the founding of NATO in 1949. Almost no research has been devoted to an organization within the United Nations called the Military Staff Committee (MSC) – the core component of Roosevelt’s UN army. This organization highlights the first post-war American grand strategy of global engagement, grounded in the new UN. The failure of the MSC to function as intended – and the resultant impact on the UN as a whole – brought a new set of strategic principles to the fore, notably George F. Kennan’s strategy of containment of the Soviet Union. In particular, the incapacity of the MSC to provide a functional framework for collective security, coupled with simultaneous Soviet activities against Greece, Iran, and in particular, Turkey, guaranteed this shift from a global to a regional security framework. The institutions that resulted, such as NATO, continue to define the international system today.

2. The Origins of the United Nations Organization

Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been intimately involved with US President Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations project; he had also run on an internationalist platform as the Democratic Party’s vice-presidential candidate in 1920. Some two decades later, now-President Roosevelt would reflect on his engagement with the League as he contemplated a successor for that declining institution. As the specter of war swept across Asia, Africa, and Europe between 1937 and 1940, he initiated conversations on a future international organization with Secretary of State Cordell Hull, among others.

For a variety of reasons – primarily political considerations related to isolationist attitudes within the United States – Roosevelt sought to keep his distance from

the political process of drafting a new international organization. As a result, most of the debate over the nature of the new organization would take place in the US Senate and within the State Department.¹ These discussions started in a special committee in the State Department in 1939, and expanded immediately after Pearl Harbor: on February 15, 1942, Secretary of State Cordell Hull appointed an Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy.² This committee did not last long, soon replaced by a subcommittee specifically dedicated to the question of a new international organization. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles headed the new body, which was to be run day-to-day by a State Department official named Leo Pasvolsky.³

Pasvolsky was the guiding light to the discussions on a post-war organization in the State Department.⁴ A Russian émigré who had arrived in the US as a young man, Pasvolsky had attended the Paris Peace Conference as a journalist, then found a position at the Brookings Institution as an economist. An ardent internationalist, he had begun arguing for an international alliance of democratic states with broad policing powers during his time at Brookings. This internationalist bent fit well with Roosevelt's State Department, leading Pasvolsky to join the Roosevelt Administration in 1934. He served in a variety of posts before Hull asked him, in September 1939, to join the State Department's Postwar Foreign Policy Committee, and then Welles' subcommittee on a new international organization.⁵

There were a number of major points of contention in the internal State Department debates between February 1942 and the Yalta Conference in February 1945. The first was whether or not the new international organization should be comprised of regional councils, or a single unitary executive.⁶ The second debate centered on the membership and nature of the central executive committee, should a vision of a singular, unitary organization be pursued. In particular, there were extended debates on whether or not the new international organization should be dominated entirely by the four major Allied powers, each exercising a near-unlimited veto power, or whether it should be balanced in a variety of ways with middle and small powers. At stake in the latter debate

¹ Among the five senators on the Special Committee that would oversee early discussions of the matter was Harry S. Truman of Missouri. Indeed, Truman as Senator, and then as Vice President, would take a leading position on both rousing public support for the proposed United Nations Organization, as well as pushing President Roosevelt to endorse and support the organization. Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations: a Story of Superpowers, Secret Agents, Wartime Allies and Enemies, and their Quest for a Peaceful World* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 7-9.

² Ilya Gaiduk, *Divided Together: The United States and the Soviet Union in the United Nations, 1945-1965* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 19.

³ Stephen Schlesinger, "FDR's Five Policemen: Creating the United Nations," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall, 1994), pp. 88-93, 88; Randall B. Woods and Howard Jones, *Dawning of the Cold War: The United States' Quest for Order* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 34-35.

⁴ Schlesinger, 34-35.

⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁶ Gaiduk, 10-13.

was the recognition of equality between sovereign states, a core principle of the Westphalian system for more than three hundred years, which was clearly in tension with the realities of alliance politics in the Second World War.

Roosevelt's initial attitude towards these debates favored the dominance of four "policemen": the US, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union.⁷ Each would supervise a sphere of influence to maintain peace, and promote democracy and stability. But this idea would fade during the war as the costs of conflict inspired a groundswell of internationalist sentiment in the US and greater interest in a more muscular, unitary international organization.⁸ After the Tehran Conference in November and December 1943, Roosevelt asked Hull for an update on the drafting of the proposed international organization charter. At that juncture, Pasvol'sky's "United Nations Organization" draft consisted of a small executive council with veto powers held by the "Big Four" and a mandate over security issues; a general assembly which would include representation from all states; an international court of law; and a supporting secretariat.⁹ On February 3, 1944, Roosevelt met with Pasvol'sky and Hull, and approved their draft charter, with some modifications. The biggest of these was to expand the executive council beyond the "Big Four," adding seven rotating members. After these conversations, Roosevelt told Hull and Pasvol'sky to use the draft as the basis for a US proposal for the new United Nations Organization, which he would discuss with General Secretary Stalin, Prime Minister Churchill and Chairman Chiang Kai-Shek during a planned summit sometime in August 1944.¹⁰

One of the central remaining concerns within the State Department was exactly what policing powers and resources would be available to the new international organization. Roosevelt ascribed the failure of the League of Nations – in part – to its inability to enforce its resolutions. Highlighting that concern, in August 1944, Secretary of State Hull gave the opening remarks at the first "Informal Conversations on the General Nature of an International Organization for the Maintenance of Peace and Security" in Washington, DC. There, he stated that

It is generally agreed that any peace and security organization would surely fail unless backed by force to be used ultimately in case of failure of all other means for the maintenance of peace. That force must be available promptly, in adequate measure, and with certainty. The nations of the world should maintain, according to their capacities, sufficient forces available for joint action when necessary to prevent breaches of the peace.¹¹

⁷ Schlesinger, 6-7.

⁸ Woods and Jones, 17.

⁹ Schlesinger, 45.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 47.

¹¹ "Remarks of the Honorable Cordell Hull," August 23, 1944, Washington, DC: National Archives and Research Administration I, 78th Session of Congress, 2d Session, Document Number 181, 2-3.

Realistically, this required a strong executive dominated by the major military powers, who alone could provide the force required for such a “peace and security organization” as envisioned by Hull and Pasvolsky in their internal State Department conversations.

Discussion between the major powers on these questions would be delayed until the Yalta Conference in February 1945. There, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt hotly debated the Security Council’s exact constitution and the nature of the veto to be held by each of the major powers.¹² Roosevelt’s great goal at Yalta was “bringing the Soviet Union into the United Nations,” a task with which he succeeded only by making concessions elsewhere – in terms of both the UN’s structure and the post-war landscape in Eastern Europe.¹³ As a result, what eventually emerged from Yalta was a Security Council dominated by five major powers, with France to be included at American request.¹⁴ All would possess a veto over UN action. The Security Council’s great power would be its ability to authorize military action; in theory, that gave the body a monopoly on the global use of force. But to enforce United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, which would be binding, it was necessary to give the body an enforcement mechanism. To that end, it was proposed that each of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – the United States, Great Britain, France, Nationalist China, and the Soviet Union – would offer contingents which would be seconded to the United Nations for predetermined periods. Thus, the UN would have a standing military force at all times to counter aggression.¹⁵

3. The Military Staff Committee

This new military force would answer to the United Nations Security Council, but would be managed by a separate organization. First titled the Security and Armaments Commission, this body would be made up of senior officers from each of the Big Five. They would serve both as advisors and managers of the UN forces. Both the idea of a standing military force and the Military Staff Committee (MSC) were accepted by negotiators from all the major powers, after minor revisions. There was broad general consensus among the democratic powers and Nationalist China in favor of a more muscular international organization, and the MSC was seen to be one of its most critical components.¹⁶ At the San Francisco Conference, between April and June 1945, the provisions creating the

¹² Schlesinger, 93.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jane Boulden, *Prometheus Unborn: The History of the Military Staff Committee*, (Ottawa: Canadian Center for Global Security, 1993), 1-2.

¹⁶ “Chiefs of Staff Committee: Security Council – Military Staff Committee,” October 12, 1945, British National Archives (BNA), CAB 121-86, 16, 1-9.

UN military forces were enacted as articles 43 to 47 of the new United Nations Charter.

The UN Military Staff Committee began its work in February 1946, negotiating the structure of the new UN “Army.” Its first task was to define how Article 43 would function. This provision stated that

All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.¹⁷

The UN Charter intended this force to be available in the very near future, noting that “numbers and types of forces... and the nature of the facilities and assistance to be provided... shall be negotiated as soon as possible.”¹⁸ Particularly critical was the question of what forces would be provided by each of the powers and where they would be stationed. It was expected that the UN Security Council would determine the potential nature of their deployment, with some role to be played by the UN Secretary General. The first man in that role, Trygve Lie, assumed the work of the UNMSC to be so critical to his position that he requested it dispatch a senior military officer to “advise me at all times on military questions,” noting that “the Military Staff Committee... occupies a position of special importance.”¹⁹ Emphasizing both the importance and urgency of establishing this new body, the UN Security Council’s first resolution directed the establishment of the MSC in accordance with the UN Charter.²⁰

The senior representatives of the Big Five sent to New York to negotiate the framework of the Military Staff Committee were leading military men, signaling the importance with which the body was invested. The Truman Administration divided the US team between three senior officers of general rank: Army Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgway, Air Force General George C. Kenney, and Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner.²¹ During the Second World War, Ridgway was commander of the famed 82nd Airborne Division, and ended the war as Corps Commander. General Kenney had been the commander of all US Air Forces in Southeast Asia; while serving on the MSC, he was also commander of Strategic Air Command, which managed all US nuclear strike forces. Admiral Turner

¹⁷ Article 43, United Nations Charter, 1945.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Secretary General Trygve Lie to The Chairman of the Military Staff Committee,” June 3, 1946, UNARMS, S-0183-00004-24.

²⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolution of 25 January 1946, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1\(1946\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1(1946))

²¹ “Press-Releases - Military Staff Committee,” 1946-1947, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, S-0183-00004-24, #13-15, 1-6.

was the commander-in-chief of US amphibious forces in their island-hopping campaign across the Pacific, supervising the battles of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, and Saipan, among others.²² In addition, Colonel Louis Truman, President Truman's nephew, was also seconded to the UNMSC.²³ These men had continuing, dual roles at the most senior levels of the US military. This complicated their work, but emphasized the importance ascribed to the body by Truman. The British, Chinese and French delegates were equally distinguished.²⁴

The Soviet delegation, however, was markedly different. Stalin's attitude towards the UN project had been one of skepticism since the start. Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov had tasked seasoned diplomat (and former Minister of Foreign Affairs) Maxim Litvinov with completing a study of American proposals for the UN Organization in late April 1944.²⁵ With great candor, Litvinov wrote that "we are interested in the establishment of the organization of security in a lesser degree than the USA, England and other states" because there would be fewer opportunities for the Soviet Union to use the new body in their own interests compared to the Western democracies.²⁶ Not only did the Atlantic Charter – seen as a provisional step towards the new organization – run counter to Soviet interests and principles, but the Soviet Union was likely to be vastly outnumbered by American and British allies within the future Security Council and the General Assembly.

Litvinov did hasten to add that there were major goals to be pursued at the UN negotiations: to "avoid the impression that we put obstacles in the way of the establishment of the organization and assume responsibility for the eventual failure of the negotiations."²⁷ Molotov largely followed these principles during his attendance at the San Francisco conference. There, his central aims had been to avoid being responsible for the collapse of the negotiations, and to safeguard at all costs the strength of the veto power, so that the UN could not block Soviet strategic aims.

The Soviet delegation sent to negotiate the Military Staff Committee in early 1946 reflected this Soviet skepticism in the UN Organization: Stalin sent three

²² Press Release: General Ho Ying-Chin," August 2, 1946, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (UNARMS), SO-0183-00004-24, #16, 1-2.

²³ "Press Release: China Assumes Chairmanship of the Military Staff Committee," June 30, 1947, UNARMS, S-0183-00004-24, #24, 1.

²⁴ The leading Chinese delegate was General He Yingqin, Commander-in-Chief of the Nationalist Armies; he had accepted the Japanese surrender of all their forces in China and was managing their repatriation before arriving in New York. The senior French officer was Lieutenant General Pierre Billotte, Charles de Gaulle's Chief-of-Staff. The British sent King George VI's senior aide-de-camp, General Edwin Logie Morris, as well as Guy Garrod, Commander-in-Chief of their South East Asian Air Forces and Admiral Sir Henry Ruthven Moore, Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet (the main body of the Royal Navy, assigned to defend the British Isles). "Press-Releases-Military Staff Committee," 1946-1947, UNARMS, S-0183-00004-24, #8-10, 1-4; UN Staff Committee to Visit West Point, 9 May 1946, UNARMS, S-0183-00004-24, #3, 1-2.

²⁵ Gaiduk, 19.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 20.

representatives, none of whom shared their full biographies via press release, as all their compatriots did. This may have made sense, given that the head of the delegation was General Alexander Fillippovich Vasiliev, a Lieutenant General in the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the Red Army).²⁸ The fact that Stalin dispatched less-than-prominent intelligence officers to head his delegation suggests he never intended to allow the negotiations to succeed.

This would soon be confirmed as the UNMSC set about its work.

4. The Soviet Threat to Turkey, 1945-1946

While the San Francisco Conference and negotiations in New York proceeded, President İsmet İnönü and the Turkish government faced their own crisis. After the defeat of Germany, Soviet forces in Bulgaria, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus “waged a war of nerves along the two nations’ common border,” triggering fears of a Soviet invasion.²⁹ Stalin sought to take advantage of what he saw as ambiguity in Turkey’s relationship with Great Britain and the United States in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. As a result, Turkey, alongside Greece and Iran, would play a central role in testing the new collective security framework developed at the United Nations.

Turkey had maintained a careful neutrality in the interwar period. As an anti-revisionist power – one that was generally satisfied with its internationally-recognized boundaries after the successful Turkish War of Independence – Turkey had sought to balance its strategic partnerships with the Western powers and the Soviet Union. Seeking recognition as a “modern power,” President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had steered Turkey into the League of Nations in 1932, abided by the international arbitration decision over Mosul, and signed a series of treaties of friendship with its former enemy in Greece.³⁰ Turkey’s general interest in the Balkans and Near East was to prevent the dominance of any one power. After Atatürk’s death in 1938, his successor as president, İsmet İnönü, allied with Great Britain and France, but declined to declare war on Germany or Italy after the rapid defeat of France.³¹

The German invasion of the Soviet Union removed the immediate threats to Turkey, but simultaneously complicated the long-term prospects. Should either the USSR or Germany win decisively, it would be in a position to permanently dominate the Near East and the Balkans, and thus seriously undermine Turkish

²⁸ Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Lurye, GRU: Dela I Ludi [GRU: Files and People], (Moscow: Olma Media Group, 2002), 71.

²⁹ Woods, Jones, xi.

³⁰ William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 58-59.

³¹ *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919-2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, Edited by Baskın Oran (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2010), 251-252. Yusuf Turan Çetiner, *Turkey and the West: From Neutrality to Commitment* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2015), 60-65.

independence. Entering the war against Germany too early without any guarantees might risk becoming a Soviet satellite, as Stalin intended to dispatch Red Army forces to Turkish soil.³² Entering too late might make enemies of the Western democracies, President İnönü's preferred allies.³³ Skilled Turkish diplomacy kept the country out of the conflict until February 1945.³⁴ At that point, having come under tremendous pressure from Great Britain and the Soviet Union, Turkey finally declared war on Germany.³⁵

The last year of the war brought dreaded fears of encirclement by the Soviet Union. Red Army forces had occupied northern Iran in 1941; in the fall of 1944, the Soviet Union occupied Romania and declared war on neutral Bulgaria, occupying it as well.³⁶ As Germany withdrew its forces from the region, Greece exploded into a civil war that threatened to make communist encirclement even more complete.³⁷ As a result, Turkey seemed to find itself in the alarming strategic position that it had sought to avoid in the 1930s.

The likely point of Soviet pressure was over the question of the Montreux Convention. In 1936, Turkey, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and a number of other states had signed the Montreux Convention to regulate the straits between the Black Sea and Mediterranean. Merchant vessels were to be allowed free passage. Warships could pass through the straits, but with tonnage and type limitations; the terms were less restrictive for "riparian states" – those states bordering the Black Sea, such as the Soviet Union. In 1936, the Soviets considered this a virtue, as it effectively limited the threat of German or Italian vessels moving into the Black Sea.³⁸

In early 1945, American diplomats and intelligence officers remained optimistic that the Soviets would be satisfied with minor revisions or a renegotiation of Montreux within the framework of the new international organization. A report by The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in January 1944 indicated optimism that the question of the straits could be resolved after the War's conclusion.³⁹

³² Hale, 97-99.

³³ John M. VanderLippe, *The Politics of Turkish Democracy: Ismet Inonu and the Formation of the Multi-Party System, 1938-1950* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 90.

³⁴ Hale, 102. One of the objectives with the timing of the declaration of war was to guarantee Turkish admittance as a founding member of the new United Nations Organization, the prerequisite for which was a state of belligerence against the Axis no later than the end of February 1945.

³⁵ Hale, 84. Indeed, Hitler's military staff had already drawn up plans for the invasion of Turkey and the conquest of the Middle East to follow. They were contingent only upon the rapid defeat of the Soviet Union in 1941. To delay this eventuality, Turkey reached a ggression Pact with Nazi Germany immediately prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union, which guaranteed continued economic exchange and non-intervention by Turkey in the German-occupied or -allied Balkans. Playing a major role in the decision by President İnönü to sign the pact was the ongoing pro-German revolt in Iraq, as well as evidence produced by the German Foreign Ministry indicating that the Soviets had demanded the occupation of critical parts of Turkey as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. See Youssef Aboul-Enein, *The Secret War for the Middle East: The Influence of Axis and Allied Intelligence Operations During World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), and Hale, 85, 90, 102.

³⁶ Bulgaria joined the Axis, but refused to declare war on the Soviet Union. Bulgaria did declare war on the US and UK in 1941.

³⁷ Hale, 103.

³⁸ "Report: The Montreux Convention of the Straits," November 2, 1944, Edwin C. Wilson Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, San Diego (SCA-UCSD), pp. 1-27.

³⁹ "The Problem of the Turkish Straits," January 6, 1944, Edwin C. Wilson Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, SCA-UCSD, p.1.

The State Department largely agreed with the OSS assessment, noting in early 1945 that there was “no decisive indication of a basic change in Soviet policy toward the Straits.”⁴⁰ The same official also noted Turkish fears as to Soviet intentions, however.⁴¹

Soviet actions in the last months of the war belied the optimistic American assessment, and suggested the Turkish government’s fears were well-placed. In March 1945, the Soviet Union renounced the twenty-year-old Treaty of Friendship with Turkey.⁴² On June 7, 1945, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov demanded a revision of the Montreux Convention.⁴³ He also told Turkish Ambassador Selim Sarper that the Soviet Union required bases in the straits region, as well as the handover of several of Turkey’s eastern provinces.⁴⁴ When Molotov suggested that this new arrangement would be modelled on the new Soviet agreements with Poland, Sarper realized the full extent of the danger.⁴⁵ The leaders of the Free Polish government had just been put on trial in Moscow; this arrangement meant occupation.

İnönü and the Turkish government rapidly rejected the Soviet demands, assuming that the Soviet government would be unwilling to start a fresh war in the aftermath of the Second World War.⁴⁶ But not long after, they began learning of Soviet troop concentrations in Bulgaria; at the same time, the Soviet press was becoming inveterately hostile.⁴⁷ The Turkish government pursued a preventative course of action at the San Francisco Conference in May and June, proposing several amendments to the UN Charter about the role of pre-existing treaties and regional security arrangements clearly oriented towards a possible debate over the Montreux Convention.⁴⁸ The question remained of Soviet willingness to cooperate with the new international organization. Even as Molotov attended the conference, Soviet troop numbers along the Turkish border continued to grow.

The discussion in Washington centered on the ability of the new UN Organization to handle the crisis, and the damage that might be inflicted if it proved incapable of doing so. In late June 1945, the experienced American Ambassador in

⁴⁰ Harry N. Howard, “The Soviet Union and the Problem of the Turkish Straits,” January 24, 1945, Department of State, Division of Special Research, Edwin C. Wilson Papers, SCA-USCD, pp. 1-19.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 15-19.

⁴² Çetiner, 96.

⁴³ Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East: Great Power Conflict and Diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 258.

⁴⁴ VanderLippe, 130-131; Çetiner, 124.

⁴⁵ Kuniholm, 259.

⁴⁶ Hale, 112.

⁴⁷ Hasanli, Jamil. *Stalin and the Turkish Crisis of the Cold War, 1945-1953* (Lexington Books, 2011), 230.

⁴⁸ “Guide to Amendments, Comments, and Proposals Concerning the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals for a General International Organization,” 14 May 1945, UN Conference on International Organization, Box 17, Folder 1, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, pp. 39, 43, 49.

Ankara, Edwin Wilson, wrote to Truman that “the Russian proposals to Turkey are wholly incompatible with the spirit and principles on which we are seeking with the Soviet Union to set up a new world organization.”⁴⁹ In early July, the Turkish Ambassador told American Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew that Soviet territorial demands on Turkey would lead to war, threatening to destroy “the spirit and letter of all that had been achieved at San Francisco.”⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter, however, Truman’s staff recommended to him that “the United States maintain a detached, watchful attitude toward British and Soviet policies in Turkey so long as the two countries adhered to the principles of the United Nations.”⁵¹

The growing straits crisis became a major point of discussion at the Potsdam Conference in July and August 1945. By mid-July, the British estimated that 200,000 Soviet soldiers now faced the Turkish border.⁵² British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden was particularly alarmed, fearing the wartime alliance might be collapsing. Undersecretary Alexander Cadogan wrote to Eden that if the British did not draw the line at Turkey, the Soviets “would proceed to make more and more demands on Persia and on other countries in the Middle East,” possibly threatening the whole postwar order, and certainly British interests in the Middle East.⁵³

Trying to navigate between passivity and preserving the new international institution, Truman tried to meet Stalin halfway on the issue of the Straits during their meetings at Potsdam. Assuming Stalin meant in good faith his stated concerns on freedom of navigation through the Turkish straits, Truman proposed a new agreement on freedom of navigation he thought might satisfy Stalin. But Stalin demurred. It soon became clear that Stalin’s goal was not freedom of navigation through the Straits, but instead, the political domination of Turkey. Near the end of the Potsdam Conference, after a discussion with Admiral William D. Leahy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Truman made clear to Stalin that the United States “opposed fortifications of any kind at the straits.”⁵⁴ This hardening of the lines on the Straits question was among the first to convince Truman that Stalin was a man with whom he could not work. He later recalled that

The persistent way in which Stalin blocked one of the war-preventative measures I had proposed showed how his mind worked and what he was after. I had proposed the internationalization of all the principal waterways. Stalin did not want this. What Stalin wanted was control of the Black Sea straits and the Danube. The Russians were planning world conquest.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Çetiner, 106.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 107.

⁵¹ Kuniholm, 260.

⁵² Ibid, 262.

⁵³ Woods, Jones, 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 264.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 265.

Truman may have overstated the shift in his mindset over the issue; for the next ten months, the United States would continue to intercede in the hopes of finding a compromise solution.⁵⁶

Such efforts were to no avail. The Soviets refused to respond to US and UN attempts at mediation for almost a year; instead, they backed anti-Turkish groups in Georgia and Armenia who laid claim to Eastern parts of the country.⁵⁷ According to Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs, this was inspired in part by Lavrenty Beria – head of the Secret Police – constantly harping on the fact that

certain territories, now part of Turkey, used to belong to Georgia and how the Soviet Union ought to demand their return...he convinced Stalin that now was the time to get those territories back. He argued that Turkey was weakened by World War II and wouldn't be able to resist.⁵⁸

One means of exerting pressure was through propaganda: Russian state media inflated a war scare, blaming the Turks for a hostile environment. The Red Army moved larger and larger formations into Bulgaria and the Balkans, holding frequent military maneuvers that left nerves frayed in Ankara.⁵⁹ When Turkish students destroyed two pro-Soviet presses in Istanbul in late November 1945, fears of an invasion grew.⁶⁰

That fall, Ambassador Wilson strengthened his language in his cables to Washington. He wrote that continuing Soviet demands for the straits were “a pretense for Soviet domination.”⁶¹ He, and junior diplomat George F. Kennan in Moscow, both emphasized to Washington that “Turkey was the principal Western gap in the Soviet system of defense.”⁶² Wilson added in a note to Washington that he saw Turkey as equivalent to the Sudetenland crisis of 1938, with Stalin in the role of Hitler.⁶³ The rest of the State Department also cast the

⁵⁶ Inevitably, the United Nations was seen as the forum for resolving the problem. The State Department sent a proposal to the Turkish Government on November 2, 1945, for a revision to the Montreux Convention on the Straits, substituting “The United Nations system for that of the League of Nations” who had guaranteed the original treaty in 1936. Kuniholm, 267.

⁵⁷ Ambassador Wilson carefully reviewed Soviet claims, even drafting a historical review of state power and ethnic groups in Western Anatolia dating back to the Roman Empire, but concluded there was nothing to Soviet demands. Official American reports concluded that Soviet claims in 1945 related to simultaneous demands for a revision of the Straits Agreement, as well as “pressure for a pro-Soviet orientation in Turkish policy.” “The Claim of the Soviet Union to the Kars-Ardahan Region: A Summary Statement,” Edwin C. Wilson Papers, Box 1, Folder 13, Special Collections and Archives, SCA-UCSD, pp. 1-6; for Wilson's handwritten calculations, see “East Turkey - Chronology of Sovereignty,” 1945, Edwin C. Wilson Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, SCA-UCSD, p.1.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Roberts, “Moscow's Cold War on the Periphery: Soviet Policy in Greece, Iran, and Turkey, 1943–8,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jan 2011), pp. 58-81, 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 268.

⁶⁰ Hasanli, *Stalin and the Turkish Crisis of the Cold War*, 106.

⁶¹ Kuniholm, 270.

⁶² Ibid, 269-270.

⁶³ Ibid, 270.

Turkish crisis as a decisive one as 1945 came to a close: in December 1945, officials there wrote a memorandum stating that the American public thought the Turkish crisis should be handled by the UN, but “should the UN fail to take adequate measures to remedy the situation, the organization would lose its authority and the world would fall into chaos.”⁶⁴ The appeasement analogy and the potential damage to the UN would both influence Truman as the new year began.

In response to the events in Turkey, the continued Soviet occupation of Northwestern Iran, and a bellicose speech by Stalin on February 9, 1946, Diplomat George F. Kennan in the Moscow Embassy penned his famous long telegram.⁶⁵ He twice pointed out that Turkey and Iran were the states in immediate danger of Soviet expansionism. He also spent a significant portion of the telegram outlining how the Soviets saw the United Nations. He noted that

the Russians will participate officially in international organizations where they see opportunity of extending Soviet power or of inhibiting or diluting power of others....the Soviet attitude toward UNO [United Nations Organization] will depend largely on loyalty of other nations to it, and on degree of vigor, decisiveness and cohesion with which those nations defend in UNO the peaceful and hopeful concept of international life, which that organization represents to our way of thinking. I reiterate, Moscow has no abstract devotion to UNO ideals. Its attitude to that organization will remain essentially pragmatic and tactical.⁶⁶

In other words, collective security through the United Nations was unlikely to succeed. That proposition was being tested simultaneously. Kennan's Long Telegram arrived in Washington less than a month after the Military Staff Committee's first meeting, and four weeks before the US delegation requested each power draw up its own proposal of general principles.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Jamil Hasanli, “The ‘Turkish Crisis’ of the Cold War period and the South Caucasian Republics, Part II,” *The Caucasus and Globalization*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2009), 122-133, 165.

⁶⁵ While the Turkish war-scare unfolded, a related crisis grew in Iran. The country had been occupied by Great Britain and the Soviet Union in August 1941, as they feared the sitting government was pro-Hitler. But when the time came to withdraw at the end of the war, Stalin delayed, then began setting up its own puppet state in Northwestern Iran in November 1945. This became the first central battle of the United Nations, referred to the Security Council on January 19, 1946, by the Iranian Ambassador to the UN.

Just weeks later, on February 9, 1946, Stalin gave a bellicose speech demanding increased sacrifices by the Soviet people in the name of greater production, suggesting that “Only when we succeed in doing that [tripling Soviet economic output] can we be sure that our Motherland will be insured against all contingencies. This will need, perhaps, another three five-year plans, if not more. But it can be done, and we must do it.” This, and the rhetoric from Soviet news agencies, made clear the Soviet Union had no faith in the new international order or institutions such as the United Nations. “Speech Delivered by Stalin at a Meeting of Voters of the Stalin Electoral District, Moscow,” February 9, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gospolitizdat, Moscow, 1946, 41. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116179>

⁶⁶ Telegram, George Kennan to George Marshall [“Long Telegram”], February 22, 1946. Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers.

⁶⁷ Boulden, 38.

5. The Voyage of the USS Missouri

As Truman soured on Stalin, he and the cabinet decided it was time to take a harder line. On January 25, 1946, Truman was notified that it was time to return the remains of Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Münir Ertegün, who had passed away during the war.⁶⁸ The initial proposal to the President was to dispatch the remains on a cruiser as a sign of respect; the same had been accorded the British Ambassador not long before.⁶⁹ But in the context of growing regional concerns, the debate soon grew to a discussion of whether or not to commit military forces to the Eastern Mediterranean to indicate support of Greece, and more particularly, Turkey.

However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the President on February 21 that they opposed sending naval forces there, instead relying on “the United Nations because of the geographic distances and the impracticability of assured lines of communication.”⁷⁰ But Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal reversed himself in a private discussion with Secretary of State James Byrnes at the end of that month.⁷¹ They proposed to the President that the USS Missouri, one of the flagship battleships in the US Fleet, be dispatched with the Ambassador’s remains, and visit Athens on its return voyage from Istanbul. Truman’s personal connection with the ship – it was named for his home state and had been christened by his daughter – and the vessel’s role as the host ship for the surrender of Imperial Japan in Tokyo Bay meant that the symbolism was hard to misconstrue. For the Turkish government, the arrival of the Missouri on April 6, 1946, in Istanbul meant “that the United States had established an independent policy in the Near and Middle East based on defense of its own interests.”⁷² Beginning in June, the US Navy began regular, unannounced patrols of the Eastern Mediterranean by flagged American warships.⁷³

On April 4, 1946, as the Missouri steamed through the Mediterranean, new Ambassador General Walter Bedell Smith had held a late night meeting with Stalin. He had two lines of questioning: would Stalin support resolutions from the Security Council seeking to resolve the Iranian and Turkish crises? He

⁶⁸ “Memorandum for the President,” January 25, 1946, Independence, MO: Truman Library (TL), OF 536-86, 55.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kuniholm, 336.

⁷² Ibid., 336-337.

⁷³ Çetiner, 130. In another critical development, on the same day the Missouri arrived in Istanbul, President Truman announced to a huge crowd in Chicago that the Selective Service Act would be extended. The aim of this continued mobilization was not aimed at any country, he declared; instead, “the immediate goal of our foreign policy is to support the United Nations to the utmost.” For the time being, American security remained rhetorically hitched to the collective security efforts then underway in New York. Secretary Byrnes informed the Turkish Ambassador to France at another of the collective security summits – the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Paris – that, “if in the past the United States was unaware of Turkey’s problems, the government now was ‘well posted,’ and took great interest in them.” Kuniholm, 337-341.

asked the Generalissimo directly, “How far is Russia going to go?” Stalin coyly replied “We’re not going to go much further.” Bedell replied, “You say ‘not much further,’... but does that ‘much’ have any reference to ‘Turkey?’” Stalin obliquely referenced the United Nations Security Council before adding that he hoped “in the future differences could be settled outside the UN.”⁷⁴ Here, again, Turkey became the lynchpin of determining Stalin’s commitment to the new international order.

6. The Failure of the MSC and Collective Defense

As crisis after crisis unfolded, the UN Military Staff Committee endeavored to complete its work as quickly as possible. In March 1946, its committee members had voted that each of the Big Five representatives would draw up their own proposal on the general principles of the forces to be put at the disposal of the United Nations.⁷⁵ One of the primary objectives was to avoid the provision of forces on an ad-hoc basis; the American aim was to have forces committed to UN command at all times.⁷⁶ These could then serve as a rapid response force that could counter aggression within weeks, not months. Four reports were delivered to this effect on April 3, 1946, from the French, British, Chinese and American representatives. The Soviets, however, did not submit any statements. At first, it was assumed that the Soviet Union was simply stalling for time while it examined the reports of the other four permanent powers.⁷⁷ But as summer turned to fall, it became clear that the Soviets were obstructing the UNMSC’s work.

The timing could not have been worse for the United Nations: the Straits crisis reached its height in late August 1946, with ever-increasing Soviet military activity along Turkey’s borders. On August 19, Secretary of State Dean Acheson warned the Soviets that if they attacked Turkey, it would constitute a “matter for action on the part of the Security Council of the United Nations.” But without military force or the ability to override a veto, such a threat was entirely toothless.⁷⁸

In September 1946, after six months without any action from the Soviet delegation, General Kenney met privately with the Soviet representative, General Vasiliev, to encourage a prompt submission of this first report. He informed his Soviet counterpart that the United States would be reconvening the Basic Principles Subcommittee to discuss the structure of forces. At that juncture, Vasiliev finally

⁷⁴ Ibid, 334. Stalin also told Smith that “I have assured President Truman and have stated publicly that the Soviet Union has no intention of attacking Turkey...but Turkey is weak, and the Soviet Union is very conscious of the danger of foreign control of the Straits, which Turkey is not strong enough to protect. The Turkish Government is unfriendly to us. That is why the Soviet Union has demanded a base in the Dardanelles. It is a matter of our own security.” This was a decidedly mixed message. Roberts, 76-77.

⁷⁵ Boulden, 3.

⁷⁶ “Copy of Minute from General Sir H.L. Ismay to Mr. T.L. Rowan,” December 14, 1945, BNA, CAB 121-86, 25, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hasanli, “The ‘Turkish Crisis’ of the Cold War period,” 126.

delivered a general principles report, emphasizing a tightly circumscribed view of UN forces that left few doubts as to Soviet discontent with the Western powers' proposals. Unable to reach any sort of conclusion, the MSC sent a report to the Security Council on September 25, 1946, highlighting their inability to reach a compromise on basic principles.⁷⁹

In the face of a possible Soviet invasion of Turkey, and the inability of the UN Security Council to reach a resolution or have forces capable of enforcing such a resolution, President Truman decided to respond unilaterally. In late September, he increased US naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and dispatched the supercarrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt to the area.⁸⁰ While still maintaining channels for the renegotiation of the Straits Agreement, the Truman administration increasingly sought alternatives to the UN and its collective security order. The increasing US military presence, and other crises, led Stalin to de-escalate the Straits crisis. In October, Stalin began to withdraw forces. By the end of the year, the threat of war had receded.

7. Conclusion

By early 1947, astute observers could clearly see that a “Cold War” between the United States and Soviet Union had begun. On March 12, 1947, President Truman delivered an address to Congress, declaring that

To ensure the peaceful development of nations, free from coercion, the United States has taken a leading part in establishing the United Nations. The United Nations is designed to make possible lasting freedom and independence for all its members. We shall not realize our objectives, however, unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.⁸¹

Truman went on to articulate the need for direct military aid to Greece and Turkey, both threatened by the expansion of communism. He provided a moral and legal justification by stating that the US would be protecting the “Charter of the United Nations” and giving effect to its principles through its direct provision of aid.

This announcement of the Truman Doctrine rendered official the change of course that had been underway since the straits crisis of the previous year. It signaled that the president believed that the UN Organization was incapable of protecting the values enshrined in its charter. As Truman noted in his speech,

⁷⁹ Boulden, 4.

⁸⁰ Dionysios Chourchoulis, *The Southern Flank of NATO, 1951-1959: Military Strategy or Political Stabilization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), xxvi.

⁸¹ “Aid to Greece and Turkey, The Department of State Bulletin Supplement,” May 4, 1947, TL, PSF196-8, 831.

“the situation is an urgent one requiring immediate action, and the United Nations and its related organizations are not in a position to extend help of the kind that is required.”⁸² It was clear to members of the administration that new institutions would need to be created to meet the needs of American security.

There was still some – albeit fast-fading – hope that the UN could become functional in line with its original vision. With that in mind, in the spring of 1947, the Security Council demanded a final report from the Military Staff Committee within sixty days, recommending the structure and nature of UN Forces.⁸³ While a lengthy report of ten chapters was indeed produced on April 30, 1947, disagreements – particularly on the deployment and size of forces and where these forces were to be stationed when not in use – prevented any strong conclusions from being proffered.⁸⁴

In a last effort at relevance, in the summer of 1947, the MSC decided to instead discuss how large the force would need to be in order to act as an effective deterrent of aggression. The US provided a provisional estimate that it would require 20 divisions, 3,800 aircraft and the equivalent of about half of the active strength of the US Navy.⁸⁵ The French, British, and Chinese all made considerably smaller estimates, with the British proposal at less than half the strength of the US proposal. Clearly, the United States estimated it would take greater force to maintain global peace than the other powers. The matter of expense in maintaining forces for the UN Security Council also played a role in shaping the estimates. The Soviets, once again, failed to provide any sort of report, effectively tabling this part of the MSC negotiations as well.⁸⁶

The Soviets continued to frustrate the American aim in founding the United Nations, hamstringing not only its enforcement mechanism in the UNMSC, but also casting an enormous number of vetoes: the Soviet Union would issue the first 57 vetoes in the Security Council, all of the total vetoes cast between 1946 and 1956.⁸⁷ This action succeeded in undermining the collective security framework envisioned by Roosevelt and initially adopted by the Truman Administration.

It was in this context of the Security Council's failure to solve the growing crises in Turkey, Greece, and Iran that the first proposal for a Western defensive alliance was made.⁸⁸ The source was a Canadian diplomat, Escott Reid, who argued for

⁸² Ibid, 830.

⁸³ Boulden, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 5-6.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Security Council Vetoes,” *Dag Hammarskjöld Digital Library*, January 6, 2017, <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>.

⁸⁸ The Greeks, among others, hoped the formation of the UN Army would resolve their ongoing civil war, as a message from the Greek Ambassador to Trygve Lie in April 1945 suggested. “Letter From Greek Ambassador, London,” April 2, 1945, UNARMS S-472-115-12, 1.

a temporary regional security organization formed under the auspices of the United Nations charter “that could take measures of collective self-defense until the Security Council could act.”⁸⁹ Not long after, Canadian Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent took up the same call at a much more public venue. In a speech to the UN General Assembly, he proposed an organization that could guarantee regional security through a defensive alliance.

Another proposal was forthcoming from the United States. On June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall delivered a speech at Harvard where he called for broad US aid to reconstruct Europe. This was the first step towards the Marshall Plan. As proposed, it was also explicitly couched in the terms of the United Nations, and received broad approval from American internationalists.⁹⁰ The Marshall Plan was followed by a series of US-encouraged arrangements aimed at the integration of Western European defense. An early step in this direction had already been taken by France and Great Britain in the Treaty of Dunkirk, a mutual defense agreement, which was signed on March 4, 1947.⁹¹ Western European leaders followed this with the Brussels Pact in March 1948, reaching an agreement on military and political cooperation between Belgium, France, Great Britain, Luxembourg and The Netherlands; it marked a step in the direction of the future European Union. A military organization for the Western Union, the Western Union Defense Organization (WUDO), came into being later that year. WUDO was, however, a shell of an organization.⁹² Without US participation, a Western European defensive organization lacked confidence or coherence in the face of the Soviet threat.

For internationalists, the UN had been seen as the best way to maintain an American commitment overseas. It was clear that the US public was unwilling to support longstanding military commitments overseas outside of its framework in the immediate aftermath of the war. Only the obvious failure of the UN project to provide a framework for collective security and the American role overseas led to the very quiet beginnings of talks on a possible US commitment to the Brussels Pact in the early summer of 1948.⁹³ This would lead to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization the following year.

By August 1948, it was clear the MSC had failed as an instrument of power. Besides holding up all agreements on the nature of forces to be placed at the disposal of the United Nations, the Soviet Union had demanded – in the words of General Ridgway – that “the US... agree to the prohibition of all use of atomic weapons...while at the same time Russia clandestinely created her

⁸⁹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO 1948: The Birth of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Lanham, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 110.

own atomic energy installations.”⁹⁴ Broad, general expectations across the world that the United Nations would provide a global “police force” were dashed. Collective security had failed. In the context of the Turkish, Iranian and Greek crises, this meant unilateral American military support would be needed instead. Without an enforcement mechanism or the ability to reach a consensus in the UN Security Council, collective security would give way to regional defense and national interest.

American policymakers took pains to make clear that NATO was not in opposition to the UN, but instead intended to supplement it, in light of “the UN’s obvious failure to function in the way the charter had intended.”⁹⁵ The birth of NATO marked the final abandonment of the collective security principle in favor of regional defense, with one exception: the UN-sanctioned war in Korea.⁹⁶ But in all respects, it was the exception that proved the rule. The enormously ambitious project of building collective security had failed, to be replaced by the regional defensive associations that remain the cornerstones of international security today.

⁹⁴ Boulden, 10.

⁹⁵ Kaplan, 217.

⁹⁶ On January 13, 1950, the Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations stormed out of the Security Council in protest over the seating of Nationalist China instead of Communist China in that body. Six months later, North Korea invaded South Korea. The absence of the Soviet Union enabled the passage of a successful resolution on June 27, 1950, invoking military action against an aggressor state for the first time. It was apparent that only with relative unity could the UN fulfill its vision as a provider of collective security: only US allies had voted in favor of the resolution. Complicating the matter was the fact that the type of regional coalition proposed, per Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, were required to be “consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.” The Soviet Union would rapidly come to claim that NATO was in fact an aggressive alliance, in violation of said charter. Article 52, United Nations Charter, 1945.

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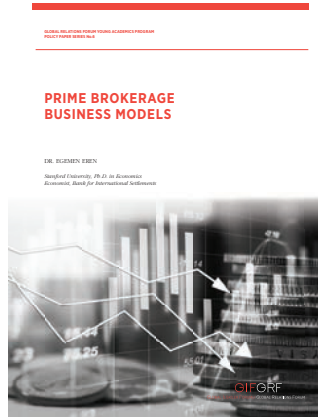
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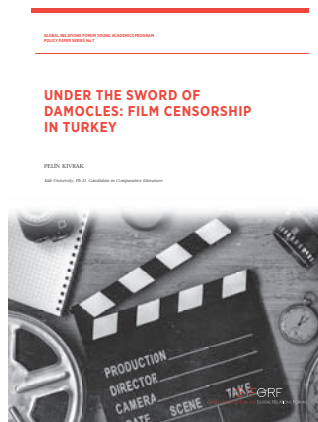


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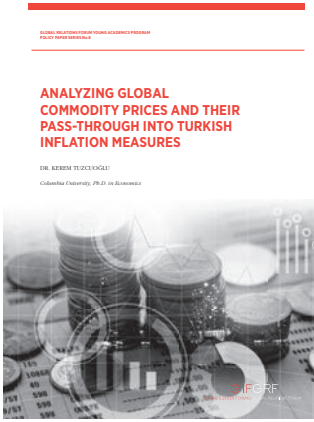


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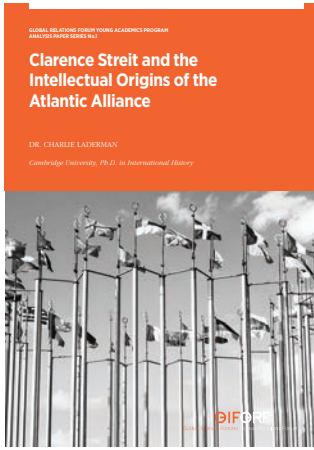


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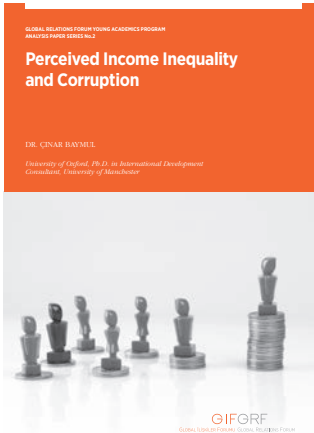
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