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Norasmahani Hussain*

Abstract

On 4 April 1949, NATO was established with the ultimate aim to counter the encroachment of the Soviet Union in various countries especially in the Europe continent. Greece and Turkey were among the early victims that suffered from the aggression of the Soviet Union, but both were not invited to join NATO. Britain, one of the prominent founding countries of NATO, strongly opposed these two countries from joining NATO. The existing literature on the reason why Britain was reluctant to invite Turkey to join NATO was because of its plan to have Turkey in a forthcoming Middle East Command (MEC) plan. This study however will demonstrate otherwise. This study seeks to show that the decision of Britain to have Turkey in the MEC was not a reason but the MEC was merely used as a means to ensure Turkey and its security partner, Greece, stay outside of NATO. The method used in this study is a qualitative method that scrutinizes

* Norasmahani Hussain is a Senior Lecturer at the History Section, School of Humanities, University Sains Malaysia. E-mail: norasmahani@usm.my.

and analyses British archival records such as the Foreign Office Papers (FO 371), the Cabinet Office Papers (CAB), the Defence Ministry Papers (DEFE), the House of Commons Parliamentary Debate (HANSARD), the Private Papers of Bevin (FO 800), the Prime Minister's Office Papers (PREM 8), and the Colonial Office Papers (CO). This study found that Britain, or specifically its Foreign Secretary which was Ernest Bevin used the MEC as a means to avoid Turkey and also Greece from joining NATO, while conflict between these countries over Cyprus was the underlying cause of both omissions from NATO. In the justification of Bevin, the problem between Turkey and Greece because of Cyprus would disturb the organization which was just beginning to find its feet. Therefore, the decision to put Turkey in the MEC instead of NATO was due to ensure the political stabilization of NATO.

Keywords: Bevin, the MEC plan, NATO, Turkish and Greek membership, Cyprus

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I. Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance that was established on 4 April 1949 in Washington D.C. The twelve original countries were the United States (hereafter the U.S.), Britain, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Portugal, and Italy. The responsibility of NATO for defense and security matters was seen by its members as the best mechanism to combat the encroachment of the power of the Soviet Union and Communist ideology in the post-Second World War era. There are two distinct groups with different types of NATO membership. The first consists of the seven founding countries that initially formed NATO: the U.S., Britain, Canada, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.¹ The second group consists of those countries that were invited to join NATO. Portugal and Iceland were invited because it was believed they would be an asset to NATO.² In the case of Norway, Denmark, and Italy, they were invited because they had been threatened or had the potential to be threatened, by the Soviet Union.³

Seemingly, it would have been logical for Greece which suffered from communist insurgents in the Greek Civil War

¹ The United States Office of Historian. *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*] 1948, *Western Europe*, Vol. III. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1948): 225, 31 August 1948.

² The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1948*, 211, 9 August 1948.

³ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1948*, 60-51, 22 March 1948.

(1946-1949), and Turkey which suffered from heavy diplomatic and political pressure by the Soviets on the Turkish Straits settlements (1946-1953) to also have been invited to join. These two countries were also victims that faced Soviet aggression in the early Cold War period, the same enemy faced by all NATO members. But strangely, both countries were denied being invited to join NATO. Historians studying the exclusion of Greece and Turkey from the perspective of Britain have considered two reasons: the geographic location of these countries and the Middle East Command (hereafter MEC) plan.⁴ This study, however, believes the MEC was merely used as a *means* to keep Turkey and its security partner, Greece, outside NATO, while tensions over Cyprus were the underlying cause of their exclusion. Historians such as Chourchoulis, Kuniholm, Crawshaw, and McGhee have discussed the dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus in their works.⁵ However, they focus only on the

⁴ These scholars included Ekavi Athanassopoulou, *Turkey – Anglo-American Security Interests, 1945-1952: The First Enlargement of NATO*. London: Frank Cass, (2012): 170; Behçet K. Yeşilbursa. “Turkey’s Participation in the Middle East Command and its Admission to NATO, 1950-52,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4, (1999): 76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263209908701287>.

⁵ Dionysios Chourchoulis, *The Southern Flank of NATO, 1951-1959: Military Strategy or Political Stabilization* London: Lexington Books, (2015): 114-179; Bruce R. Kuniholm. “Turkey and NATO,” in *NATO and the Mediterranean*, eds. Lawrence S. Kaplan, et al. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., (1985): 220-221; Nancy Crawshaw. *The Cyprus Revolt: An Account of the Struggle for Union with Greece*. London: George Allen & Unwin, (1978); George C. McGhee. *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey’s NATO Entry Contained the Soviets*. Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., (1990): 162-169.

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Cyprus problem in the period after Greece and Turkey became NATO members in particular the 1955 Cyprus Emergency in which Greek and Turkish Cypriot factions clashed with British forces.

It is worth mentioning here that Greece and Turkey were of great importance to British strategic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This was because of these countries' proximity to British lines of communication to the Eastern Empire which encompass Cape Colony in Africa, India, Australia and China; and the security of Middle East oil tanker transportation.⁶ Considering the fact that British strategic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East depended on these two countries not being conquered by an outside power, especially the Soviet Union, and both countries had yet to participate in any security systems, hence the decision of Britain to keep rejecting Greece and Turkey from joining NATO during the high Cold War period could be regarded as bizarre.

What is more, by 1950 and onwards, the U.S. had already supported the inclusion of Greece and Turkey in NATO because the U.S. was greatly impressed with the contribution of Greece and Turkey in the Korean War and believed these two countries

⁶ Kew, The National Archive [hereafter TNA]. DEFE 5/3, COS (47) 9 (0) Final. Note by the Secretary: Future Defence Policy. 23 January 1947. See also Norasmahani Hussain. "The Origin of U.S. Containment Policy in 1947: The Perception of British School," *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 4, (May 2022): 64. [https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202205_25\(4\).0002](https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202205_25(4).0002).

could provide the same military commitment if they were brought into NATO.⁷ Therefore, the purpose of this study is to further inspect the other rejection reasons for Britain to Turkish membership in NATO in 1950 as they relate to the Cyprus issue. This study also reassesses the question of the MEC, which is regarded by previous historians as a key reason for Britain to refuse to include Greece and Turkey in NATO. This study argues that Britain used the MEC as a means to prevent Turkish, and thus Greek, membership of NATO due to the Cyprus issue.

II. The Dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus

Historically, when Greece and Turkey had quarreled over Cyprus, the island was still under British rule due to its status as a British Crown Colony since 1925. Initially, the Cyprus dispute was a conflict between Britain and the people of Cyprus, due to the demand of the latter for self-determination. However, this friction eventually shifted from a colonial dispute to an ethnic dispute between the people of the island themselves, namely the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. These two ethnic groups became rivals because they had different ideas about the future settlement of Cyprus. The Greek Cypriots demanded that

⁷ Kemal H. Karpat. "Political Developments in Turkey, 1950-70," *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 3, (1972): 352.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263207208700214>.

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Cyprus be united with Greece, famously referred to as *enosis*.⁸ Yet the Turkish Cypriots preferred a partition of the island, known as *taksim*.⁹ This ethnic dispute became more complicated when both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots dragged their mother countries, Greece and Turkey, into the conflict.¹⁰

The decision of Britain to retain its sovereign power in Cyprus was also indirectly responsible for the trouble between Greece and Turkey over the island. The decision to stay in Cyprus was because Cyprus could provide a base for military offensives against the Soviet Union in the midst of the Cold War since the Soviet Union was within the bomber range of the bases in Cyprus.¹¹ Thus, Cyprus should be retained under British possession. Britain, therefore, put forward the Winster Constitutional Proposals of 1948 in order to stay in Cyprus.¹² In response to this initiative by Britain, the Greek Cypriots brought their mother country Greece into the local conflict to combat the Winster Proposals and to fight for *enosis* in mid-1948. As the Greek Cypriots turned to Athens, the Turkish Cypriots sought

⁸ Joseph S. Joseph. *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics: From Independence to the Threshold of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, (1999): 171-172.

⁹ Monteagle Stearns, *Entangled Allies: U.S. Policy Toward Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, (1992), 109.

¹⁰ Crawshaw, *The Cyprus Revolt*, 45.

¹¹ TNA. DEFE 2/1654, COS (48) 70th Meeting. Minute by Air Ministry to COS Committee. 9 April 1948.

¹² Murat Metin Hakki. *The Cyprus Issue: A Documentary History, 1878-2006*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., (2008), 9-10.

help from their mother country, Turkey, to assist them against the *enosis* movement.¹³

The determination of Britain to maintain control of Cyprus, even after the abortive constitutional offer,¹⁴ worsened the situation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots and generated more problems between Greece and Turkey.¹⁵ At the domestic level, the demand for *enosis* became stronger when a Cypriot communist party, the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL – *Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou*) initiated the first notice of a plebiscite – a collection of signatures to support or oppose union with Greece – in September 1949 by publicly offering the Ethnarchy¹⁶ (the Right) its co-operation in promoting the cause of *enosis* before the UN.¹⁷ Greece had supported this active effort by the Ethnarchy and AKEL in pursuing *enosis* since late 1949. For instance, ten deputies in the Greek Parliament supported proposals for the union of Cyprus with Greece during a motion tabled on 13 December 1949.¹⁸ The increased support of

¹³ Joseph, *Cyprus: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics*, 13.

¹⁴ George H. Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion: British Policy in Cyprus, 1939-1955*. London: Greenwood Press, (1990), 85-88.

¹⁵ Ronald R. Krebs, "NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict," *International Organization* 53, no. 2, (1999): 343-377.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Joseph, "Cyprus: Domestic Ethnopolitical Conflict and International Politics," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 15, no. 3-4 (2009): 395. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081899550904>.

¹⁷ TNA. CO 67/352/2. From the Governor of Cyprus to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 12 December 1949.

¹⁸ TNA. FO 371/78426/R 11624/1022/19. From Athens to Foreign Office. 14 December 1949.

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Greece for the *enosis* movement and a heightened plebiscite campaign in January 1950 provoked the Turkish press and the Federation of Turkish Associations (FTA) to organize an anti-plebiscite movement. According to the British Ambassador to Turkey, Noel Charles, Turkey was determined to remain friendly with Greece, but it could not allow any change of sovereignty in Cyprus in a manner harmful to Turkish interests.¹⁹ Seemingly, the plebiscite caused the dispute between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots to become more intense and contributed to a further deterioration in relations between their respective mother countries, Greece and Turkey.²⁰

The tension over Cyprus worsened further when the Ethnarchy and AKEL attempted to publicize the plebiscite result which favored the union with Greece at the UN. Both had visited the U.S. State Department in order to get American support.²¹ However, only the Ethnarchy delegation had a chance to meet the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, Jack McFall, at the State Department on 13 September 1950 since the communist delegation of AKEL had been denied entry to the U.S.²² During

¹⁹ TNA. FO 371/78427/R 11889/1022/19. From Angora to Foreign Office. 21 December 1949.

²⁰ TNA. FO 371/78422/R 4849/1022/19. Special Broadcast to Cyprus regarding Turkish attitude to Cyprus and propaganda in favors of her return to Greece. 5 May 1949.

²¹ TNA. CO 67/370/4. From Cyprus to Foreign Office. 31 August 1950.

²² Ioannis D. Stefanidis. *Isle of Discord: Nationalism, Imperialism and the Making of the Cyprus Problem*. United Kingdom: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., (1999): 16.

the meeting, McFall told the Ethnarchy delegation that the U.S. government preferred the Cyprus question to be settled within the framework of Anglo-Greek relations.²³ What is more, since the Cypriot Ethnarchy delegation was not a member of the UN, it could not submit a resolution without a sponsor.²⁴ Although the efforts of the Greek Cypriots were fruitless in bringing the 1950 plebiscite to the UN, they did however worsen their conflict with the Turkish Cypriots. As the mother countries of these two ethnic communities, relations between Greece and Turkey, as well as their internal politics, were affected by this conflict. Greco-Turkish rivalry over Cyprus has since brought these two countries to the brink of war.²⁵ Given that the relationship between Greece and Turkey deteriorated further between late 1949 and 1950 as a result of the plebiscite, and given that, at the same time, both countries were in a search for security with the Western powers, this study believes Greco-Turkish rivalry over Cyprus affected the chances of these countries of becoming members of NATO. This in turn leads to a new insight into the MEC, which this study believes was a means of keeping Turkey, and thus Greece, outside of NATO.

²³ TNA. FO 371/87723/RG 1081/191. From Washington to Foreign Office. 14 September 1950.

²⁴ Kelling, *Countdown to Rebellion*, 107.

²⁵ Krebs, "NATO and the Greco-Turkish Conflict," 356.

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III. Turkish interest in NATO and the defense of the Middle East, late 1949 to early May 1950

When the Western powers finalized the treaty of NATO in April 1949 without Turkey as a member, Turkey felt that it was 'being abandoned and left outside the thinking of the Western powers as regards security arrangements.'²⁶ Turkey also believed it was 'the most exposed position of all European countries as regards pressure and possible attack from Soviet Russia.'²⁷ Turkey was therefore relentless in its pursuit of security guarantees from the Western powers. In response, the Western powers, in particular Britain and the U.S., offered Turkey two solutions for defense matters: the Anglo-American "Joint Declaration" to Greece and Turkey and a Mediterranean pact that would be established under the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty of Alliance of 1939. Turkey, however, regarded these two solutions as inadequate to guarantee its safety. For the former, Turkey was not satisfied with the American declaration since it was not delivered formally as Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin did in the House of Commons:²⁸ rather, Dean Acheson (the U.S. Secretary of State) broadcast the declaration only on U.S. national radio,

²⁶ TNA. FO 371/78670/R 5695/1072/44. Sir Noel Charles to Sir A. Rumbold, 24 May 1949.

²⁷ TNA. FO 371/78670/R 5695/1072/44. Sir Noel Charles to Sir A. Rumbold, 24 May 1949.

²⁸ U.K. Parliament. *HANSARD*, 18 March 1949, Vol. 462 London: H.M.S.O., (1945): cc2533-2543, col. 2535.

with no official support from the Senate.²⁹ For the latter, Turkey recognized that there was no other Eastern Mediterranean country, with the possible exception of Israel in a Mediterranean pact, which could provide any force capable of assisting Turkey in case of a major war.³⁰ Hence, a Mediterranean pact could bring Turkey nothing ‘but added complications and burdens.’³¹ Turkey did press the U.S. for a political arrangement, in which the U.S. would at least associate itself with the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty of Alliance of 1939. However, the U.S. appeared inconclusive regarding this suggestion.³²

These developments led Turkey to seek admission in a stronger defense pact, namely NATO. Turkey, therefore, approached Britain in early November 1949, in particular Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin and William Strang (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office).³³ Unfortunately, both indicated that no extension could be considered at that time, stating that ‘the Atlantic Pact itself does not cover the Eastern Mediterranean and the Atlantic Powers as such will not

²⁹ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 2915/1072/67G. From Angora to Foreign Office. 14 March 1949.

³⁰ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 3948/1072/67. Mr. E. N. Larmour to Mr. G. W. Furlonge. 12 April 1949.

³¹ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 3948/1072/67. Mr. E. N. Larmour to Mr. G. W. Furlonge. 12 April 1949.

³² The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1949, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. VI. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1948): 1682, 13 October 1949.

³³ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir W. Strang. 17 November 1949.

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themselves be discussing Eastern Mediterranean questions.’³⁴ Although Turkey had yet to approach the U.S., it had already been made aware of the reluctance of the U.S. to enlarge NATO when, earlier in October 1949, Acheson rejected the request of Greece for its inclusion in NATO because he believed that NATO must be made to work first in Western Europe before its extension to other countries could be considered.³⁵

This attitude of the U.S. made Turkey become more anxious about its security because it believed that if the Soviet Union succeeded in penetrating the Middle East, Turkey would become the next target.³⁶ Turkish fear of a Soviet attack continued to increase when, in early 1950, Cevat Açıkalın (the Turkish Ambassador to London) undertook a general tour of the Balkans, China, and South East Asia and ‘found all shades of opinion convinced that Russia would, before long, begin to probe against Turkey and the Middle East.’³⁷ It seemed to Turkey that ‘the United States policy of attempting to defend Western Europe, while leaving doors in the Middle East and the North-East

³⁴ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11080/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 22 November 1949.

³⁵ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1949*, 447-449, 28 October 1949.

³⁶ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11942/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir W. Strang, 16 December 1949.

³⁷ TNA. FO371/87948/RK 1071/1. Record of Mr Bateman's conversation with Turkish Ambassador regarding Turkey's position as a key point in event of attack by Russia and need for U.S. aid for defence purposes. 20 February 1950.

Mediterranean wide open, was a grave political and strategical error.³⁸

Worried about the safety of the Middle East, as well as its own, Turkey, therefore, approached Britain, who was currently reinstating efforts for a regional defence pact in the Middle East in cooperation with Egypt but faced the intransigence of the latter over the Suez Canal Zone which caused Anglo-Egyptian negotiations to reach an impasse. Necmettin Sadak (the Turkish Foreign Minister) told Bevin about the readiness of Turkey to play an active role in the defence of the Middle East by proposing Anglo-Turkish cooperation in the region and also offered Turkish assistance in Anglo-Egyptian talks for a new settlement regarding the Suez Canal Zone.³⁹ However, this new approach by Turkey towards the defence of the Middle East had a hidden agenda. By collaborating with Britain in the defence of the Middle East and playing an honest broker in the row between Britain and Egypt regarding their conflict over the Suez Canal Zone, Turkey was actually bidding for its place in NATO. This was evident when, immediately after Turkey told Britain about these aforementioned matters, in April 1950, Turkey for the first-time requested admission into NATO.⁴⁰ Moreover, Ambassador Açikalin also

³⁸ TNA. FO371/87948/RK 1071/1. Record of Mr Bateman's conversation with Turkish Ambassador regarding Turkey's position as a key point in event of attack by Russia and need for U.S. aid for defence purposes. 20 February 1950.

³⁹ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/3. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs in Strasbourg on 1st April. 1950.

⁴⁰ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/7. *aide-mémoire*. 3 May 1950.

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stated that: 'If, ..., Turkey were politically bound with a larger group [NATO], this would not only serve to warn Russia off, but would also materially assist Turkey in any steps she might be able to take towards the advancement of British policy in the Middle East.'⁴¹ This statement by Açıkalın seems to validate the claim that the Turkish *démarche* to Britain was a gambit for securing Turkish accession to NATO. However, the response by Britain to the Turkish request for membership in NATO was not as Turkey had expected. Instead of concurring with its request, Britain or particularly Bevin and the Foreign Office decided to bring Turkey into a regional defence pact of the Middle East, namely the MEC. This unexpected decision by Britain convinces this study that the MEC was likely a means for blocking Turkey, and thus Greece, from joining NATO.

**IV. Anglo-Egyptian efforts for MEC, 1946 and early 1950:
An analysis of the MEC as a means of excluding Turkey
from NATO**

The MEC was a regional defense pact of the Middle East pursued by Britain, with the ultimate aim of safeguarding this vital strategic area from Soviet penetration.⁴² The idea for this military arrangement that would consist of Britain, Egypt, Israel,

⁴¹ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/8. Record of conversation with Turkish Ambassador by C. H. Bateman. 5 May 1950.

⁴² TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/11C. Foreign Office minute by Strang. 1 June 1950.

and the Arab States had emerged in late 1945 due to the demand of Egypt for the unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone.⁴³ Britain, especially the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff (hereafter the COS) anticipated that the Soviet Union would manage to take over the Suez Canal Zone and subsequently military facilities comprising fighter squadrons and bomber bases in Egypt if Britain agreed to evacuate.⁴⁴ Britain was convinced that, by turning the Suez Canal Zone into an Allied base and offering Egypt an equal partnership in a regional defense effort (which became officially known as the MEC in early 1951),⁴⁵ Soviet penetration in the Middle East could be avoided even if British troops had evacuated this zone.

The participation of Egypt in the British plan for MEC was the most important criterion for ensuring the effectiveness of this military arrangement. This was because Egypt was the key strategic area of the Middle East due to it was the only country in the Middle East possessing the facilities and resources for the conduct of a major war and on which the defense of any part of the Middle East can be based.⁴⁶ The first prominent

⁴³ TNA. FO 371/50774/U 181/36/70. Policy Required to Secure British Strategic Interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. 5 January 1945.

⁴⁴ TNA. CAB 131/12, DO (46) 40. Memorandum by Secretary of State to the Defence Committee. 13 March 1946.

⁴⁵ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/45/4. Personal for Foreign Secretary from C.I.G.S. 5 November 1945.

⁴⁶ TNA. CAB 131/9, DO (50) 40. Co-operation with Egypt, Report by the Chiefs of Staff. 19 May 1950.

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Anglo-Egyptian effort for the MEC occurred in 1946. Bevin managed to persuade the Egyptian Prime Minister, Ismail Sidky, to agree to the MEC that would produce combined military arrangements in the event of war.⁴⁷ This agreement was an act of compromise of Prime Minister Sidky in return for the agreement of Bevin to gradually withdraw British troops from Egypt, which would be completed by September 1949 as stipulated in the Bevin-Sidky Treaty of 1946.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Sidky changed his mind when he opted for a complete and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone.⁴⁹ This matter indicated that Egypt would not agree to create MEC as long as British troops still occupied Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone. This matter deadlocked Anglo-Egyptian efforts to arrange the MEC.

In regard to the MEC being a means for excluding Turkey from NATO, it is important to note here that Turkey was not actually considered a potential member of the MEC during the first attempt of Bevin to reach this military arrangement in 1946. This was evident when, in late 1945, the Chief of Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.), Field Marshall Alan Brooke, who was tasked with informing Middle Eastern countries about some form of Middle East Defensive Confederation backed by Britain, did

⁴⁷ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/46/56. Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. 25 October 1946.

⁴⁸ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/46/56. Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. 25 October 1946.

⁴⁹ TNA. FO 800/505/Sud/47/5. From Foreign Office to Cairo. 25 January 1947.

not visit Turkey.⁵⁰ This forms the basis of the notion that the MEC was used as a means of exclusion, because it indicates that there was no reason for Turkey to be included in this regional defense pact given that its involvement was less significant than that of Egypt, Israel, and the Arab States. However, the Egyptian government proved difficult to deal with, leading Bevin and the Foreign Office to fail in reaching a formal proposal for MEC on their first attempt.

However, when Egypt renewed a strong demand for unconditional British troop withdrawal from Egypt and the Suez Canal Zone on 3 January 1950, Bevin began a new effort for MEC. Bevin accordingly visited the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mohammed Salaheddin, and the Egyptian Prime Minister, Mustapha Nahas Pasha, in Cairo in late January 1950. Bevin argued that the countries of the Middle East, together with Britain, would have to work together to ensure the security of this region. If it were left weak and undefended, 'it would be a temptation to the Russians to advance.'⁵¹ Although Salaheddin agreed that 'from the point of view of general security, the Middle East still constituted a missing link,'⁵² he however still yearned for the unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Egypt and the

⁵⁰ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/45/4. Personal for Foreign Secretary from C.I.G.S., 5 November 1945.

⁵¹ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/50/3. Record of a conversation between Mr. Bevin and the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs in Cairo on 28th January, 1950.

⁵² TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/50/3. Record of a conversation between Mr. Bevin and the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs in Cairo on 28th January, 1950.

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Suez Canal Zone.⁵³ Nahas Pasha told Bevin that 'Egypt did not wish to be the victim of any new [defense] arrangements which were come to.'⁵⁴ Egypt also asserted that it would consider negotiating and cooperating in MEC only after the British forces had fully evacuated the Suez Canal Zone.⁵⁵ However, Bevin preferred formal arrangements for MEC to be made before British troops could be evacuated because Bevin was convinced that 'Egypt would not be able to defend that vital territory by herself and that assistance must be given to her.'⁵⁶ Since both Britain and Egypt refused to compromise, it was difficult for Bevin to make any progress such as putting forward a formal proposal for the creation of MEC.

It is interesting to note here that, during the new attempt of Bevin to formulate the MEC in early 1950, he still did not envisage the involvement of Turkey. It is evident that at this time Bevin thought the involvement of Turkey in MEC was not necessary. This matter thus proves that Turkey was not at the forefront of British consideration in regard to matters of the defense of the Middle East, both in 1946 and early 1950, which is

⁵³ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/50/3. Record of a conversation between Mr. Bevin and the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs in Cairo on 28th January, 1950.

⁵⁴ TNA. FO 800/457/Eg/50/4. Record of a conversation between Mr. Bevin and Nahas Pasha, in Cairo, on 26th January, 1950, 28 January 1950.

⁵⁵ TNA. FO 800/477/ME/50/3. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Egyptian Ambassador. 21 March 1950.

⁵⁶ TNA. FO 800/477/ME/50/3. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Egyptian Ambassador. 21 March 1950.

important for strengthening the argument that the MEC was used as a means for excluding Turkey from NATO. Another significant point to underpin this interpretation of the MEC is that a means rather than a reason was the response of Bevin to the suggestion of Amr Pasha to bring Turkey into the MEC. Bevin firmly asserted that much more work would have to be done on the military side if Turkey were to be included. This was because Bevin was well aware of the present state of the Turkish Armed Forces, which were still unfit for modern war, as commented by the British military attachés in Ankara in late 1949.⁵⁷ Thus, the effectiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces was probably limited to minesweeping and operating nets and booms.⁵⁸ This matter seemed to have considerable influence on Bevin's stance in March 1950: that the involvement of Turkey was less-favorable for consideration because it would impose an extra load on a military arrangement that had still yet to begin.

Ten days after Bevin had a conversation with Amr Pasha, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Sadak, told Bevin at Strasbourg that Turkey favored the closest cooperation with Britain in all matters concerning the Middle East, in particular in serving as a bridge between Britain and the Arab States, adding it would do all it could to help the British as regards Egypt, notably the

⁵⁷ TNA. FO 371/87975/RK 1192/1. Sir N. Charles to Foreign Office. 30 December 1949.

⁵⁸ TNA. FO 371/87975/RK 1192/1. Sir N. Charles to Foreign Office. 30 December 1949.

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Anglo-Egyptian dispute over the presence of British troops in the Suez Canal Zone.⁵⁹ Surprisingly, Bevin agreed for Turkey to take the initiative.⁶⁰ Considering that, earlier in March 1950 Bevin had not favored the involvement of Turkey in MEC, this new attitude was likely because Bevin was desperate to break the deadlock in the Anglo-Egyptian talks.

Given that Bevin had agreed to Turkish assistance in the Anglo-Egyptian settlement, it seemed to be axiomatic that Bevin still had not thought of bringing Turkey into the MEC. This was clear in that this subject had not been touched upon with Sadak in either Strasbourg or Paris. This indicates that, until April 1950, the British had still not considered Turkey to be involved in MEC. As aforementioned earlier, the efforts of Turkey to tie itself closer to the Middle East on defense matters formed part of its initiative in lobbying for its membership in NATO. In respect to this *démarche*, Turkey requested membership in NATO in the following month, through its *aide-mémoire* dated 3 May 1950.⁶¹ Turkey wanted the question of its inclusion in NATO to be placed on the agenda of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers in London given that the request was sent to Britain, the U.S., and France,

⁵⁹ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/3. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs in Strasbourg on 1st April, 1950.

⁶⁰ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/4. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris on 5th April, 1950.

⁶¹ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/7, *aide-mémoire*. 3 May 1950.

which are the governments of these three Foreign Ministers.⁶² Yet neither Britain, in particular, Foreign Secretary Bevin, nor the Foreign Ministers at the London Conference, responded to this request.⁶³ However, before the conference had opened, Bevin and the Foreign Office had arrived at a decision to include Turkey in MEC.⁶⁴ When Bevin relayed this notion to Acheson and Robert Schuman (French Foreign Minister) at the end of the Conference, both agreed. Subsequently, an official statement mentioning the participation of Turkey in MEC was put forward by Britain.⁶⁵

The idea that the MEC was a means of excluding Turkey from NATO, rather than a reason for doing so, is derived from this situation – that Bevin and the Foreign Office made the decision to include Turkey in MEC *after* Turkey requested membership in NATO in early May 1950. This aspect of the MEC has been neglected by historians, who argue that it was the main reason Bevin and the Foreign Office rejected Turkish requests for membership in 1950. This was apparently because, before Turkey had propounded its NATO membership request, Turkey was absent from British thinking in regard to countries that should participate in the MEC. Moreover, the weakness of the Turkish

⁶² TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/4. Conversation between the Secretary of State and the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs in Paris on 5th April, 1950.

⁶³ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/11. Foreign Office minute by Strang. 31 May 1950.

⁶⁴ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/9. Foreign Office minute by Mr Wright. 12 May 1950.

⁶⁵ TNA. CAB 131/9, DO (50) 40\, Co-operation with Egypt, Report by the Chiefs of Staff. 19 May 1950.

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Armed Forces at that time, as discussed earlier, also attributed to the unfavorable response of Bevin to include Turkey in this military arrangement.⁶⁶ Hence, it grows ever clearer to this study that the MEC was a means of exclusion, since although Turkey could contribute little militarily, Bevin and the Foreign Office were still willing to bring Turkey into this regional defense pact anyway.

What is more, the decision to bring Turkey into MEC was made without telling Turkey in advance. Turkey just found out that it was included in the MEC from the newspapers.⁶⁷ Strang explained to Açıkalın that the reason why neither Bevin nor Acheson had informed Turkey was that ‘the decision to issue the statements had been taken at the last minute and it had not therefore been possible to inform the Ambassador in advance.’⁶⁸ However, from the point of view of this study, this *démarche* is another point that substantiates the argument that the MEC was used as a means of exclusion. Whatever the reason for not informing Turkey, if Bevin and the Foreign Office were genuine about bringing it into MEC, with no hidden agenda relating to its request for membership in NATO, the British should have refrained from publicizing the decision until Turkey had been

⁶⁶ TNA. FO 371/87975/RK 1192/5. Sir N. Charles to Southern Department of Foreign Office. 30 March 1950.

⁶⁷ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/11. Sir A. Rumbold to Foreign Office. 9 June 1950.

⁶⁸ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/11A. Record of a Meeting in Sir W. Strang's Room. 1 June 1950.

informed. All these points convince this study that the decision to bring Turkey into the MEC in May 1950 was not primarily because Bevin and the Foreign Office wanted Turkey in the agreement, but rather because they wanted to avoid Turkey, and its security partner Greece, joining NATO.

Although Bevin and the Foreign Office had not stated explicitly that the MEC was their *démarche* in ensuring Greece and Turkey remained outside NATO, two actions demonstrate their subtle move. Firstly, neither Greece nor Turkey had been considered for inclusion in MEC since the idea was initiated by the British in late 1945. Secondly, the decision to put Turkey in this military arrangement was made after it requested membership in NATO in early May 1950. These two decisions appear to substantiate the interpretation of this study that the MEC was seen as a means of exclusion in British thinking.

There is one more aspect of the MEC plan that could further support the argument that it was used as a means rather than reason: that only Turkey was confirmed to be brought into this military arrangement. In the official statement dated 19 May 1950, which mentioned the new participation of Turkey in MEC, Bevin and the Foreign Office seemed unsure about including Greece, using the word 'possibly' before mentioning it.⁶⁹ Bevin, and also Acheson, preferred to give direct support to Greece if there was

⁶⁹ TNA. PREM 8/1359, DO (50) 40. Defence Committee. 19 May 1950.

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an attack from the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ This matter shows that Greece was not considered by Britain for inclusion either in the MEC or NATO. Evidently, the uncertainty of Britain about Greece being included in the MEC was linked to the Cyprus issue. This matter was reflected in the outline of disadvantages that could arise if Cyprus were handed back to Greece given by the Under-Secretary for Colonial Affairs, John Martin, to the U.S. State Department officials during their meeting in July 1950. The outline was as follows:

- (A) *There was no certainty of political stability in Greece. A future Greek Government might withdraw such facilities as had been granted.*
- (B) *Any such agreement would come as a disagreeable shock to the Turks and would damage Greco-Turkish relations.*
- (C) *It would also endanger the British political and strategic position generally in the Middle East.*
- (D) *It might in particular give the Egyptian Government occasion to think that we were "on the slide" and thus lead to increased Egyptian pressure for the evacuation of the*

⁷⁰ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/23. Foreign Office minute by Mr M. Wright. 26 July 1950.

Canal Zones.

(E) *It was in any case doubtful whether in an area as small as Cyprus the maintenance of satisfactory base facilities was compatible with the surrender of sovereignty over the island as a whole.*⁷¹

Points B and C of this outline remarked that Bevin and the Foreign Office were wary of having Greece in MEC if there was ill feeling between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus since this situation would negatively affect this military arrangement. Hence, only Turkey was confirmed to be included in MEC. This study believes the reluctance to include Greece in the MEC was motivated by the same reason Bevin and the Foreign Office refused to accept the request of Turkey for NATO membership. This was because the security of Greece and Turkey were dovetailed together, in that Turkey in NATO would have dragged Greece into NATO too, even though the latter did not apply for membership.⁷² Seemingly, the decision to bring only Turkey into the MEC, without its security partner Greece, not only clarifies further that the MEC was used as a means of exclusion. It also demonstrates that one of the reasons why Bevin and the Foreign

⁷¹ TNA. FO 371/87722/RG 1081/158. British Embassy Washington to Sir Anthony Rumbold. 14 July 1950.

⁷² TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/34. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 9 August 1950.

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Office refused Turkish requests for NATO membership was the Cyprus issue.

V. The U.S. favored NATO enlargement but Britain against it: An analysis of the Cyprus issue as a contributory reason for Britain's opposing stance

A year after NATO was established in 1949, the U.S. started to consider NATO enlargement that would include Turkey and Greece in NATO. This was due to the NSC-68 document that encouraged the U.S. to apply the formal strategy of forward defence and create the southern flank of NATO.⁷³ Thus, NATO could confront the current and the future aggression linked to the Soviet Union more efficiently. Moreover, from a geopolitical perspective, the U.S. also realized that in order to enhance and safeguard the security of the Mediterranean which regard to military considerations of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and the Soviet Black Sea Fleet's entry and exit to the Mediterranean from being threatened and conquered by the Soviet respectively, the inclusion of Turkey and Greece in NATO was undoubtedly necessary.⁷⁴ This new stance of the U.S. regarding NATO enlargement that would include Turkey and Greece was strengthened by these countries' contributions of 4,500 soldiers

⁷³ Mark Smith. *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War: Strategy and System in the Western Alliance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2000): 70-73.

⁷⁴ See The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, National Security Affairs; Foreign Economic Policy*, Vol. I. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1950), 126-492.

and 840 infantrymen of the Royal Hellenic Battalion respectively in the Korean War that broke out on 25 June 1950.⁷⁵ The U.S. who was impressed with these countries' assistance in the Korean War, started to reckon that both countries could be an asset for NATO instead of a liability, and subsequently began to advocate for the inclusion of Greece and Turkey in NATO.⁷⁶

However, the rest of NATO members were still reluctant to have Turkey and Greece in NATO because they did not consider these countries as part of the Atlantic Community.⁷⁷ Although France initially said that it would support the inclusion of Turkey and Greece in NATO, but changed its mind when the smaller members of NATO indicated opposition to extending the treaty to these Mediterranean countries.⁷⁸ However, on Britain's side, this was not the only reason why Britain kept opposing the inclusion of Turkey and Greece in NATO. It could be true to say here that the U.S.' plan to put Turkey and Greece under the forthcoming southern flank of NATO might have contributed to this Britain's rejection stance. It is worth mentioning here that, Britain already rejected the inclusion of Greece and Turkey in NATO because of these countries dispute over Cyprus since NATO's formation

⁷⁵ Max Hastings. *The Korean War* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010), 522.

⁷⁶ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1950): 1306-1309.

⁷⁷ The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 1310.

⁷⁸ The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 1310.

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years. This matter is reflected in Bevin's justification for refusing to extend the invitation to join NATO to Greece and Turkey as follows:

*Mr. Bevin said there were some political difficulties here. He noticed Ireland was left out. He would not mind Ireland coming in and he was open to discussion about Portugal, but he did think Turkey and Greece might present some difficulties.*⁷⁹

Although Bevin did not explain what 'some political difficulties' meant, given the political hostility between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus at that time, it seems likely he was referring to this issue. This was because Bevin was acutely aware the disagreement between Greece and Turkey because of Cyprus, and how serious the situation between them had become. It is possible that, if Bevin suggested that these two problematic countries be invited to join NATO, Bevin believed these countries would be unable to collaborate harmoniously with one another in NATO because the dispute over Cyprus was still far from settled. This matter would endanger NATO's stability, and could also weaken NATO's strength. Hence, it would be better for NATO founding countries not to extend the invitation to Greece and Turkey to join NATO during NATO's negotiation years. Since the

⁷⁹ TNA. FO 800/448. Record of Meeting on Thursday, 27th January, 1949. 8.

Greco-Cyprus dispute worsen after NATO came into existence, the same perception would still in Bevin's mind, hence Britain's stance on opposing NATO enlargement to include Greece and Turkey.

As this study is looking at the correlation between the Cyprus issue and the decision of Britain to keep Greece and Turkey outside NATO, it is essential to discuss this matter further. It is important to note here that, although reasons relating to the Cyprus issue could be sensed in late 1949, they only became apparent after Turkey submitted a new request for Turkish NATO membership in early August 1950 and the U.S. accepted this appeal. This was due to the fact that, prior to this, Bevin and the Foreign Office had used American reasons for rejecting the expansion of NATO as their own.⁸⁰ However, they could no longer continue with this strategy, since they did not agree with the new U.S. position to support the enlargement of NATO. Britain, therefore, had to present its own argument for not favoring Greece and Turkey as new members of NATO. It was only then that it became apparent the Cyprus issue was its reason for rejection.

The negative attitude of Britain towards NATO enlargement as it related to the Cyprus issue could already be sensed at this point, in November 1949. This was due to the less enthusiastic

⁸⁰ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/16. An answer to a question on Turkey and the Security in the Eastern Mediterranean. 16 June 1950.

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response of Bevin to the Greek Foreign Minister Mr Tsaldaris but not to the Turkish Foreign Minister Sadak, even though both Foreign Ministers had asked the same question regarding NATO enlargement to include their respective countries.⁸¹ The same matter was also reported by Principal Private Secretary of Bevin, Roderick Barclay, who stated that Bevin was more forthcoming to Mr Sadak than to Mr Tsaldaris.⁸²

There were three situations that subtly demonstrated the negative attitude of Bevin towards Mr Tsaldaris in regard to the inclusion of Greece in NATO. Firstly, Bevin promised Mr Tsaldaris something that was not going to happen – ‘that he would discuss these questions with Mr. Acheson’ – a promise that could be considered pointless because, as noted by Barclay, ‘there was in fact no opportunity to take the matter up with Mr. Acheson in Paris.’⁸³ Secondly, Bevin only suggested for the Turkish General Staff and not the Greek Staff to have contact with British military authorities, which was the British deputy of Supreme Allied Commander Europe [NATO] (SACEUR), Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery.⁸⁴ Thirdly, Bevin only followed up on this matter

⁸¹ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir R. Barclay. 17 November 1949.

⁸² TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir R. Barclay. 18 November 1949.

⁸³ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir R. Barclay. 18 November 1949.

⁸⁴ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir R. Barclay. 18 November 1949.

with the Turkish Ambassador to the UK, Açıkalın, after his return from Paris. As Charles H. Bateman, Assistant Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs noted, ‘the Turkish Ambassador should be told not more than that the matter is under review.’⁸⁵ This explains why Bateman and Rumbold only prepared a paper for Bevin to hold a conversation with Açıkalın in order to answer the inquiry of Sadak about NATO enlargement.⁸⁶

In the reports by Bateman and Barclay that detail the less-favorable response of Bevin towards the inquiry of Mr Tsaldaris about Greek inclusion in NATO, neither explained why Bevin behaved that way. Yet this study is convinced that Bevin would not respond negatively towards Mr Tsaldaris for no reason. Since there was no exact explanation for this situation, it is essential to look at this matter from a wider perspective in order to understand Bevin’s reason. Apart from the subject of NATO enlargement, Bevin and the Foreign Office were at the same time dealing with Greece over the issue of Cyprus. As discussed earlier, Greece appeared to favor the idea of Cyprus being returned to Greece, as initiated by the Ethnarchy and AKEL in a new wave of the plebiscite movement at that time. The support shown by Greece for the plebiscite might have irritated Bevin because it would have seemed ironic that Greece was hankering after closer

⁸⁵ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11079/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir R. Barclay, 17 November 1949.

⁸⁶ TNA. FO 371/78329/R 11080/1072/67G. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 22 November 1949.

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defense guarantees from Britain but at the same time supporting the union of Cyprus with Greece. Given that this union could jeopardize British strategic and defense interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East – as had been clearly outlined by Martin during his meeting with the US State Department⁸⁷ – it seems plausible that the Cyprus issue could be the reason for the negative reaction of Bevin towards Mr Tsaldaris. What is more, the statement by the Greek Prime Minister the following month – that if the international position of Greece were to be secured, the relationship with Britain must not be affected by *enosis* agitation⁸⁸ – could also substantiate the argument that the Cyprus issue was prevalent in the thinking of Bevin when he refused to consider seriously the inclusion of Greece in NATO.

The other Cyprus issue – the rapid deterioration in relations between Greece and Turkey – is also believed by this study to have been influential in shaping the stance of Bevin and the Foreign Office against NATO enlargement in 1950. As mentioned earlier, this reason only became apparent after Turkey made its second request for inclusion in NATO, in August 1950, by the time the U.S. was ready to adopt a new stance on NATO enlargement. Since the U.S. at that time started to favor NATO enlargement, it was fortunate for Turkey that the U.S. accepted

⁸⁷ TNA. FO 371/87722/RG 1081/158. British Embassy Washington to Sir Anthony Rumbold. 14 July 1950.

⁸⁸ TNA. CO 537/4978. Sir C. Norton to Foreign Office. 21 December 1949.

this appeal.⁸⁹ Britain and France, however, were still reluctant to accept Greece and Turkey in NATO.

The rejection reason of Britain towards the Turkish request for membership was apparent in the outline that the Foreign Office had prepared for Bevin before the Strasbourg meeting with the new Turkish Foreign Minister, Fuad Koprulu.⁹⁰ There were some issues raised by Strang and Bevin during their meetings with the French Ambassador and the Turkish Foreign Minister on 3 and 5 August 1950 respectively that might hint at their reason for rejecting the Turkish request for NATO membership. This study believes this reason was the Cyprus issue, which had caused the fractious relationship between Greece and Turkey. The first incident that demonstrates the Cyprus issue was forefront in British thinking was when Strang talked about the possibility of including only Turkey in NATO, without its security partner Greece.⁹¹ Seemingly, Strang did not deny to the French Ambassador that the Foreign Office agreed Turkish membership would enhance the strategic and military strength of NATO in an area in close proximity to the Soviet Union. Yet, it was odd that Bevin and the Foreign Office continued to refuse Turkish requests

⁸⁹ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, (1950), 278, 11 September 1950.

⁹⁰ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/30. Foreign Office minute by Strang. 11 August 1950.

⁹¹ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/22. Foreign Office minute by Strang. 3 August 1950.

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for NATO membership. However, since Strang mentioned that the Foreign Office had considered leaving Greece behind, even though it was well aware of the fact that these two countries were bound together in terms of security matters,⁹² this is seen by this study as proof that the Cyprus problem between Greece and Turkey was the reason the Foreign Office only favored Turkish membership.

Though Strang did not explain why the Foreign Office did not favor having Greece in NATO, this study believes it was because these British figures were deeply concerned that the two countries, engaged in a rivalry with each other, might have brought harm to NATO. This same judgment was used as justification for Greece being less favorable for inclusion in the MEC, as outlined by the Under-Secretary for Colonial Affairs, Martin, three weeks earlier.⁹³ Although the outline by Martin was for the MEC plan, it was equally applicable to NATO because the countries (Greece and Turkey), and the problem involved (poor relationship due to the Cyprus question) were still the same. Since it was impossible to bring only Turkey into NATO, it seems that the decision not to accept the Turkish request was a move taken

⁹² The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 1314, 13 September 1950.

⁹³ TNA. FO 371/87722/RG 1081/158. British Embassy Washington to Sir Anthony Rumbold. 14 July 1950.

by the Foreign Office to prevent the harm that these problematic countries might have brought to NATO.⁹⁴

The second incident that illuminates the fact that the Cyprus problem between Greece and Turkey was evident in British thinking was when Bevin asked Koprulu about the state of Turkish relations with Greece. Koprulu said that relations with Greece were very good, but he was not very happy about the internal political situation in Greece.⁹⁵ Seemingly, Koprulu did not admit clearly to Bevin that the relationship between Greece and Turkey was not in good shape. Nevertheless, the discomfort in Koprulu's voice when he mentioned the internal political situation in Greece indicated that a rift between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus did exist. Although Koprulu did not go into details about the domestic situation in Greece, it can be presumed that Koprulu was referring to recent developments, like the Ethnarchy delegation and the plebiscite result that favored union with Greece, which were well-received by Greece in Athens just several weeks before this Strasbourg meeting.⁹⁶

What is more, at the time the Strasbourg meeting between Koprulu and Bevin took place, Greece held a series of meetings that supported the idea of union with Cyprus, and the Greek

⁹⁴ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/34. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 9 August 1950.

⁹⁵ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/6. Record of Secretary of State's conversation with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs at Strasbourg on 5th August 1950.

⁹⁶ TNA. CO 67/370/4. From Cyprus to Foreign Office. 31 August 1950.

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Orthodox Church in Athens was actively involved in the *enosis* campaign.⁹⁷ As Turkey was strongly against *enosis* between Cyprus and Greece, these recent developments in Greece surely provoked Turkey, thus affecting the relations between these two countries. Turkey once asserted that if *enosis* was successfully achieved, and thus harmed Turkish interests in Cyprus, it would be impossible for Turkey to remain friendly with Greece.⁹⁸ Since Bevin and the Foreign Office were already aware of the Cyprus problem between Greece and Turkey, it seems obvious that this knowledge could have motivated Bevin to inquire with Koprulu about the state of Turkish relations with Greece, but Koprulu denied the existence of a problem. This move by Koprulu is understandable because, generally, conflicting countries were considered to be undesirable for membership because they would bring about adverse effects on NATO.

It is useful to mention here that earlier, in March 1950 during the conference in Cairo that discussed the U.S. policy for maintaining stability and security in the Near East, the trouble between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus had been touched upon. The conference concluded that 'Turkish-Greek relations could be endangered if Greek agitation of this [Cyprus] issue were [*sic*] to show signs of achieving results. It is important that we [the U.S.]

⁹⁷ TNA. FO 371/87723/RG 1081/175. British Embassy Athens to Southern Department. 10 August 1950.

⁹⁸ TNA. FO 371/78427/R 11889/1022/19. From Angora to Foreign Office. 21 December 1949.

encourage the GTI [Greece, Turkey, and Iran] states to develop their confidence in and cooperation with each other.⁹⁹ Based on this recommendation, it was deemed necessary for Turkey not to admit that Turkish relations with the Greeks were not in good shape over Cyprus, in order to avoid its second request for membership in NATO being rejected.

At the end of the discussion between Bevin and Koprulu in Strasbourg, the latter requested British support for the Turkish application to join NATO.¹⁰⁰ Bevin replied to Koprulu that he would certainly discuss the Turkish application with the U.S. when he went to New York in the next few weeks.¹⁰¹ At this point, Bevin might have sensed that there was a possibility the U.S. would accept the Turkish request, saying to Koprulu that he knew the U.S. was re-examining the whole situation in light of events in Korea.¹⁰² Therefore, in response to the request of Koprulu for British support of Turkish application to join NATO, and keeping in mind an assumption that the U.S. would accept the Turkish appeal for NATO membership, the Foreign Office prepared a lucid account of justifications for refusing the Turkish request for membership of NATO. Their reasons were detailed as follows:

⁹⁹ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 5, 16 March 1950.

¹⁰⁰ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/6. Record of Secretary of State's conversation with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs at Strasbourg on 5th August 1950.

¹⁰¹ TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/6.

¹⁰² TNA. FO 800/507/Tu/50/6.

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- (A) *If Turkey is accepted into the Atlantic Pact, Greece would have to be accepted too; although the Greek Government are not pressing for admission, they would certainly do so if the Turks were admitted and it would be difficult to exclude them without causing them bewilderment and offence.*
- (B) *There are three main reasons against admitting Turkey and Greece into the Atlantic Pact. These are:*
- i. *We would destroy the conception of the Atlantic Pact as a basis for building an Atlantic community as a political and economic association of nations having common tradition etc., and would make it clear that it was only a military alliance against Russia.*
 - ii. *We would spread the security risks, introduce military problems which have no relation to the main European defence theatre and would generally disturb the organisation which is just beginning to find its feet.*
 - iii. *Many of the existing members would*

*be strongly opposed to any extension of their obligation to go to war.*¹⁰³

The apparent reason the Foreign Office produced its own account was that it could no longer use the U.S. justifications for rejection, because it did not agree with the U.S. decision to bring Turkey, and thus Greece, into NATO. As Bevin and the Foreign Office were well aware of the disharmonious relationship between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus; thus, this study believes that while preparing this account, the Cyprus issue was one of many that had been considered by the Foreign Office in order to explain why they refused to accept the Turkish request for NATO membership.

The first point in this account that indicated the Cyprus issue was dominant in British thinking is contained in argument (a): that Greece and Turkey could not be separated in terms of security matters. As discussed earlier, due to this notion, Bevin and the Foreign Office, who initially only wanted Turkey in NATO, had to give up this idea because it was impossible to leave Greece behind. Hence, this explained their decision to reject the Turkish request for NATO membership. As shown by this study, the reason why Britain refused to have Greece in NATO was due to the Cyprus problem between these two countries. Bevin and the Foreign Office thought it was undesirable to bring two countries

¹⁰³ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/34. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 9 August 1950.

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that clashed over Cyprus into NATO, believing this problematic situation might bring harm to NATO. Since this account was made based on the consideration that Greece and Turkey would become new members of NATO, the harm that these countries might have brought to NATO because of the Cyprus problem was reflected in argument (b) reason (ii). Those harms were: would spread security risks; would introduce military problems which have no relation to the main European defense theatre; and would disturb the organization which is just beginning to find its feet.

Argument (b) reason (i) could also substantiate the claim that the Cyprus issue was the possible 'new military problems' meant by the Foreign Office. In point (b) (i), the Foreign Office argued that Greek and Turkish membership would make NATO only a military alliance against Russia. This was because these two countries were constantly under Soviet military and diplomatic threats, the same threats that were facing existing members of NATO. The question then was what were the new military problems, which had no relation to the existing members, that would be introduced to them? As Greece and Turkey had increasingly grown apart from each other because of Cyprus, this unpleasant situation also increased the risk of war between them. Therefore, it seems that the Cyprus issue was a possible new military problem that would have to be faced by the existing members if the Turkish request for NATO membership was accepted.

Since Bevin and the Foreign Office were persistent in rejecting Turkish requests for NATO membership, in the same account, another alternative was suggested for Turkey: 'if Turkey could not be made a member of the Pact some other instrument binding the United States Government to come to the military aid of Turkey would be the next best thing.'¹⁰⁴ Seemingly, Britain thought that it would be better for the U.S. to undertake a direct commitment to Turkey than for Turkey to be accepted into NATO. At this point, Bevin and the Foreign Office temporarily suggested a new option for Turkey, because they realized Turkey was disinterested in the idea of being included in MEC.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, Bevin was not mistaken about his feeling that the U.S. might accept the second Turkish request for NATO membership. His sense was vindicated when, in late August 1950, Sir Oliver Franks, the British Ambassador to the U.S., reported that the preparatory talks discussing the Turkish application were held on 1 September 1950 and the U.S. affirmed that Greece and Turkey would be included in NATO.¹⁰⁶ Since the Foreign Office had already prepared an account of reasons for its rejection, it promptly sent a copy of a brief containing the account to the U.S.,

¹⁰⁴ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/34. Foreign Office minute by Sir A. Rumbold. 9 August 1950.

¹⁰⁵ TNA. FO 371/87948/RK 1071/13. From Ankara to Foreign Office. 9 June 1950.

¹⁰⁶ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/42G. From Washington to Foreign Office. 1 September 1950.

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endorsed by the COS, Bevin, and Prime Minister Attlee.¹⁰⁷ Then, the same brief was sent to Bevin for him to use when he attended the foreign ministers meeting in New York in the following weeks, in which the Turkish request for membership was on the agenda.¹⁰⁸ Since any decision on enlargement must be made by unanimous agreement of all NATO members,¹⁰⁹ therefore, Bevin and the Foreign Office's efforts to prevent Turkey and Greece from joining NATO proved to be fruitful because the result of the meeting in New York in September 1950 showed that the North Atlantic Council (NAC)¹¹⁰ decided to reject Turkey and Greece's accession into NATO.¹¹¹ The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) also had the same view as the Foreign Office in argument (b) reason

¹⁰⁷ TNA. FO 371/87949/RK 1071/42G. From Foreign Office to Washington. 7 September 1950.

¹⁰⁸ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1218-1220, 13 September 1950.

¹⁰⁹ Consensus decision-making is a fundamental principle which has been accepted as the sole basis for decision-making in NATO since the creation of the Alliance in 1949. Consensus decision-making means that there is no voting at NATO. Consultations take place until a decision that is acceptable to all is reached. See "Consensus decision-making at NATO," Consensus decision-making, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified April 12, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49178.htm

¹¹⁰ The North Atlantic Council (Council or NAC) is the principal political decision-making body within NATO and is the ultimate authority at the head of a network of committees. Policies decided in the NAC are the expression of the collective will of all member countries of the Alliance since decisions are made on the basis of unanimity and common accord. See "North Atlantic Council," North Atlantic Council, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified September 9, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49763.htm

¹¹¹ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1218-1220.

(ii): that NATO was still fragile or unstable and thus would be unable to accept any new members as yet. This matter was detailed by Smith as follows:

*The JCS argued, with NATO's political and military institutionalisation still very much in its infancy, that admitting new members would not be beneficial. Therefore, after studying the issue through the summer of 1950, the JCS and the State Department reached a consensus that admitting Greece and Turkey was undesirable at the time, but they should be associated with NATO military planning, on similar lines to the 'goats' idea floated at the WET [Washington Exploratory Talks (on Security)] negotiations.*¹¹²

The U.S. JCS, however, suggested that an associate status be granted to Greece and Turkey, instead of full membership.¹¹³ This NATO associate status required Greece and Turkey to coordinate their military staff together in NATO defence planning

¹¹² Smith, *NATO Enlargement during the Cold War*, 76-77. See also The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1284-1285.

¹¹³ The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 1307, 9 September 1950.

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in the Mediterranean area.¹¹⁴ However, British Ambassador Charles noted that Koprulu had told him that for months the Greeks had declined to accept the co-ordination of staff with the Turks.¹¹⁵ Although Koprulu did not overtly mention the reason for the attitude of the Greeks towards the Turks, this study has grounds to propose that it was due to their dispute over the future of Cyprus: the Cyprus question formed the only problem that troubled the Greco-Turkish inter-governmental relationship at this time.

The Cyprus question proves to be a thorn in Greek-Turkish relations also could be seen during a series of meetings in Washington between the COS and the U.S. JCS over the liaison between Turkey and Greece in NATO defense planning in the Mediterranean area which arose from their NATO associate membership status. For instance, at the 26 October 1950 meeting, it was recorded that the Cyprus issue between Turkey and Greece was one that could disturb the cooperation between these countries in the Mediterranean.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Ambassador at Large Philip C. Jessup declared that the U.S. has informed Greece,

¹¹⁴ The United States Office of Historian, *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1218-1220.

¹¹⁵ TNA. FO 371/87951/RK 1071/70. From Ankara to Foreign Office. 26 September 1950.

¹¹⁶ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1688, 26 October 1950.

that the present world crisis is not a proper time in which to raise the question of the status of Cyprus.¹¹⁷

Evidently, the Cyprus issue between Turkey and Greece concerned Britain. British fears centered particularly on the damage that could be done to collaboration in NATO defense planning in the Mediterranean area. This circumstance might have strengthened the resolve of Bevin not to agree to the full accession of these two countries to NATO. He remained fixed in this position until his last day in the office and in the face of Turkish resistance to inclusion in the MEC plan. His prime concern stemmed from his fear that the two countries would prove unable to collaborate harmoniously with one another on the Southern Flank of NATO.

VI. NATO enlargement in recent years: An insight from the historical case of Greece and Turkey

It is interesting mentioning here that, even after the Cold War came to an end after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, NATO is still remain until now. In the post-Cold War era, NATO was reappraised as a cooperative-security organization whose mandate was to include two main objectives: the first is, to foster dialogue and cooperation with former adversaries in the Warsaw Pact; and

¹¹⁷ The United States Office of Historian. *FRUS 1950, Western Europe*, Vol. III, 1691, 26 October 1950.

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second is, to manage conflicts in areas on the European periphery.¹¹⁸ At present, NATO has 31 members. The latest country to join NATO on 4 April 2023 was Finland. Four non-member countries currently aspire for membership are: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Sweden, and Ukraine.¹¹⁹ The pending of these countries accession into NATO could be understood by looking at the historical case of NATO enlargement to include Greece and Turkey in 1950, which is the issue that has been discussed in this article.

It should be mentioned here that, since the creation of NATO in 1949, this alliance adopted a fundamental principle of consensus decision-making as the sole basis for decision-making.¹²⁰ Consensus decision-making means that there is no decision made based on majority voting amongst members. Article 10 of NATO shows that NATO enlargement implemented the principle of consensus decision-making as follows:

The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to

¹¹⁸ "NATO in the post-Cold War era," Britannica, accessed June 6, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization/NATO-in-the-post-Cold-War-era>.

¹¹⁹ "Enlargement and Article 10," Enlargement, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified April 12, 2023. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49212.htm.

¹²⁰ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Consensus decision-making at NATO."

*contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.*¹²¹

Britain blocked Greece and Turkey's inclusion into NATO in 1950 as discussed earlier could be seen as one of apparent example of this consensus decision-making. This was because the idea of the U.S. for NATO enlargement to include Greece and Turkey at that time was opposed by the rest of NATO members, specifically Britain. In recent case of NATO enlargement, Sweden did not have unanimous approval of all the existing NATO members, in particular Turkey, on the grounds that Sweden harbours the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which act against Turkey.¹²² Hence, Turkey vetoed Sweden's application for NATO membership in May 2022 from being processed at an

¹²¹ "The North Atlantic Treaty," Washington D.C. - 4 April 1949, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified April 10, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm.

¹²² Ece Toksabay and Essi Lehto. "Erdogan says Turkey not supportive of Finland, Sweden joining NATO," *Reuters*, May 13, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/erdogan-says-turkey-not-positive-finland-sweden-joining-nato-2022-05-13/>.

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accelerated pace.¹²³ Although Sweden already signed the Accession Protocols on 5 July 2022, making it official invitee, but until today Sweden has yet becoming official member of NATO. This matter shows that the principle of consensus decision-making applies throughout NATO existence since 1949 until today.

It is worth reminding here that, as discussed earlier in this article, Britain against NATO enlargement to include Greece and Turkey in 1950 due to these countries' disagreement over the future of Cyprus. It would be true to say that this opposing stance of Britain was derived from the principles of the 1949 Washington Treaty as follows:

The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments. They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area. They are resolved to unite their

¹²³ "First veto from Turkey to Sweden and Finland," *Yeni Şafak*, May 18, 2022. <https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/turkiyeden-isvec-ve-finlandiyaya-ilk-veto-3820504>.

*efforts for collective defence and for the preservation of peace and security.*¹²⁴

These principles of the 1949 Washington Treaty apparently manifest NATO's concern about the prospect of integrating with a country where there is an ongoing conflict.¹²⁵ This matter therefore, explain Britain's opposing stance over the case of NATO enlargement to include Greece and Turkey in 1950. What is more, these principles were improved through the 1995 Study on NATO Enlargement, which include a commitment to resolve conflict peacefully as one of the criteria that must be met by countries aspiring for NATO membership.¹²⁶ This matter apparently explain why in recent NATO enlargement, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, still have yet become NATO allies because they must resolve their respective conflict first before being admitted into NATO.¹²⁷

VII. Conclusion

After NATO was successfully established in April 1949, Greece and Turkey never gave up pursuing their membership in NATO. Nevertheless, Britain remained firm in its decision that

¹²⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "The North Atlantic Treaty."

¹²⁵ "US senator: if Ukraine and Georgia had received the MAP in 2008, I don't think the conflict with Russia would have happened at all," Radio Svoboda, accessed June 5, 2023.

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-ukraina-gruzia-nato/31288387.html>

¹²⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enlargement and Article 10."

¹²⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Enlargement and Article 10."

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these countries should not join. The geographical issue and the MEC are two reasons usually argued by scholars in explaining why Britain continued to reject Turkish requests for membership in 1950. This study, however, views this rejection from a different perspective: the ill feeling between these two countries because of their disagreement over the future of Cyprus. This was because, starting from late 1949 to 1950, the plebiscite movement in Cyprus that was initiated by the Ethnarchy and AKEL became more active and aggressive in achieving their goal of union with their mother country Greece. When Greece seemed pleased by this plebiscite campaign, this matter provoked Turkey because it believed Cyprus belonged to Turkey and not Greece. As a result, the Greco-Turkish relationship had visibly deteriorated and the Foreign Office was well aware of this situation. This fractious relationship between these two countries, whose security matters were related to each other, was deemed likely by Bevin and the Foreign Office to bring NATO more troubles than benefits.

Seemingly, the Greco-Turkish conflict over Cyprus was a contributory reason that shaped the stance of Britain towards Greek and Turkish membership of NATO. The MEC plan was used by British officials as a means for preventing Turkey and its fraternal security partner, Greece, from joining NATO. The MEC, which was initiated by Britain, is a prominent issue that has been extensively explored by previous scholars in explaining the rejection reason of Britain to Turkish applications and appeals for

membership in NATO, in May and August 1950 respectively. This study, however, shows that the MEC was used as a means, rather than a reason, for keeping Turkey, and thus Greece, outside of NATO. This matter was based on the fact that, in the early stages of forming the MEC in 1946, neither Greece nor Turkey were considered for inclusion. Only after Turkey requested membership in NATO, in early May 1950, did Bevin and the Foreign Office arrive at the decision to bring only Turkey into the MEC.

It would be true to say here that the rejection reasons of Bevin and the Foreign Office were related to the Cyprus issue and were hardly noticed before August 1950. This was evident when they chose to echo the U.S. position in this matter repeatedly in late 1949 when Turkey inquired about the possibility of NATO being extended. This occurred again in May 1950, when Turkey for the first time formally requested NATO membership, and again in August 1950, before it learned about the new U.S. decision to agree to NATO enlargement. Only after the U.S. decided to bring Greece and Turkey into NATO, due to the contribution of these countries in the Korean War, did the role of the Cyprus issue in causing Turkish requests for membership of NATO to be rejected by the British Foreign Office become apparent.

It should be noted that in the rejection reason of the British Foreign Office, as related to the Cyprus issue, the descriptions

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that were used by them were vague. This matter was possibly because Turkey had denied the fact that the relationship between itself and Greece was deteriorating over the issue of Cyprus so that this matter would not affect its request for membership in NATO. Considering that Turkey was still pressing hard for British government support for its wish to join NATO, the tack of the British government not to point clearly to the Cyprus issue could be considered a prudent move by Bevin and the Foreign Office in order to avoid irritating Turkey with a reason that they themselves had refused to admit.

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