

## Middle East Command Between 1950-1952 in the Context of Egypt and Türkiye

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### Abstract

The subject of this study is the establishment of the Middle East Command, one of the defense projects in the Middle East geography in the new world order that emerged after World War II, its purpose, its impact on Türkiye-Egypt relations among the regional countries, and its ultimate transformation into another defense pact. In our study, it is conveyed how Türkiye became involved in the Middle East Project, one of the projects planned by the Western Bloc during the Cold War period against the communist threat, and the perspective of Türkiye towards this project, which paved the way for Türkiye to join NATO for its own security. Türkiye's constant goal of representing the Western Bloc in the Middle East, despite its strong historical ties with Egypt, led to the deterioration of relations between Türkiye and Egypt, and eventually, Egypt viewing Türkiye as an advocate of the imperialist order. In conclusion, the study discusses the transformation of a planned but unimplemented project into another alliance aimed at first military and then regional cooperation, while addressing its regional effects in the Middle East and highlighting the specific implications of Türkiye-Egypt relations, which brought them to the brink of severance for a long time.

### A General Overview of the Post-World War II Era

When World War II ended in 1945 after lasting from 1939 to 1945, a new world map and a new ideological divide emerged. As borders of countries changed, a competition-based bloc formation occurred in a bipolar world dominated by communism and liberal democracy. Two major powers emerged as sides in these blocs: the USA and the USSR. Although Britain and France ended the war on the winning side, they faced significant economic and military decline. Meanwhile, under the pretext of cleansing

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the region of the German army, the USSR took control of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, causing great concern in Western Europe with this expansionist policy. The Soviet expansion into Central and Eastern Europe became a policy of control through the “bloodless conquest,” resulting in the annexation of a 1,020,000 square kilometer area under Soviet control<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the only power that could stand against the USSR was the USA. After 1945, the expansionist policies of the USSR not only caused concern among Western European states but also worried the USA. The USA interpreted the USSR’s expansionism as a general expansionism beyond Europe, leading it to take action against the USSR. Indeed, when the expansionist policy of the USSR caused pressure not only in Western and Central Europe but also in countries like Türkiye, Greece, and Iran, which were beyond the borders of Western and Central Europe, the USA felt a responsibility in international relations to be part of this, to protect the capitalist-liberal order, and initiated the process of economic and military aid to prevent the expansion of the USSR. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan were indicators of this situation. In a speech in the US Senate, President Truman stated, “I believe that the foreign policy of the United States should be to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures,” thus outlining the purpose of the doctrine bearing his name<sup>3</sup>.

This idea provided a rationale for the United States to intervene militarily in both Europe and the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia. The Truman Doctrine envisioned providing financial aid to countries like Türkiye and Greece, which were directly threatened by the Soviet Union in its fight against communism. In this context, on May 22, 1947, as a result of President Truman’s request and with the approval of the U.S. Congress, a total of 400 million U.S. dollars in military aid was decided to be provided, with 300 million U.S. dollars allocated to Greece and 100 million U.S. dollars to Türkiye<sup>4</sup>.

After World War II, not only Türkiye and Greece but also countries like West Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy had severely troubled economies. The United States had already lent money to these countries, but it was not sufficient. Therefore, following the Truman Doctrine, starting from June 5, 1947, the U.S. initiated the plan of Foreign Minister George Marshall for Europe, which had just emerged from the war and had a poor

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2 Uçarol 2008, p. 852.

3 Türker Tekin 2014, p.155.

4 Uçarol 2008, p. 860; Remini 2008, pp. 247-49.

economy<sup>5</sup>. According to this plan, European states were to collaborate among themselves and address their deficiencies, but the United States would step in where necessary. Marshall's proposal was discussed on June 27, 1947, with the participation of 16 countries, including Türkiye, and an "Economic Development Program" was prepared to be presented to the United States. A request for assistance ranging from 16.4 to 122.4 billion dollars was made from the United States. This request was made within the framework of a master plan for the positive financial foundation of Europe, and it was approved by the U.S. Senate<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the support and assistance from the United States within the Western Bloc, the USSR established the Cominform in 1947 to reorganize international communist activities in the Eastern Bloc. Subsequently, in 1949, it also established COMECON to facilitate economic cooperation among Eastern Bloc countries. The military organizations during the Cold War era were NATO for the Western Bloc (founded in 1949) and the Warsaw Pact for the Eastern Bloc (established in 1955)<sup>7</sup>.

When we look at Türkiye's policy after 1945, we see that it accelerated the process of democratization in domestic politics in response to the Soviet threat, while in foreign policy, it aligned itself with the Western Bloc and became one of the largest alliances on the borders of the USSR. In this context, Türkiye followed its Middle East and Balkan policies in line with the Western Bloc, particularly as determined by NATO, and shaped them in accordance with the policies pursued by major powers and the new balances that emerged in the world after 1950. Türkiye, located right in the middle of a bipolar world, emphasized the importance of its security for the security of the West. This policy, in a way, also influenced Türkiye's relations with Middle Eastern states. During this period, Türkiye aimed to be influential in the Middle East, taking on the role of the easternmost extension of the Western Bloc, and, in a sense, aiming to prevent the spread of communist ideology in the region while aspiring to become a leading state in the region.

### **Egypt and Nasser**

Situated in the northeastern part of North Africa, Egypt is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, Sudan, and Libya. Its geographical location, coupled with the fertility of the Nile River, has made it a prominent region throughout history, susceptible to invasions. Over the years, various

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5 Burrows 2004, p. 207.

6 Armaoğlu 2010, p. 541.

7 McMahon 2003, pp. 30-33, Sönmezoğlu 2017, pp. 508-10.

rulers and empires have held sway in the region, including the Persian Empire, Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Eastern Roman Empire, and Islamic-Arab rule. Starting around 868-905, Turkish dominance began in the region, alongside the Tulunids, followed by the Ayyubids, Mamluks, and ultimately, the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire conquered Egypt in 1517 during the reign of Sultan Selim I and remained the dominant power in Egypt until the arrival of the British in 1882. Ottoman rule in Egypt was disrupted by Mehmed Ali Pasha of Kavala, the Ottoman Governor of Egypt, who posed a significant threat to the Ottoman Empire with his rebellion. The governor's rebellion, which had become an international issue, finally concluded with the London Convention of 1840. As a result, the governorship of Egypt was granted to Mehmet Ali Pasha of Kavala and his descendants, leading to the emergence of the Khedivate of Egypt, and Ottoman sovereignty over Egypt became a nominal one<sup>8</sup>. Egypt came under the rule of another Turkish dynasty, with the condition of remaining nominally loyal to the Ottoman Empire. From 1882 onwards, Egypt was under British control and held great geopolitical significance for the British. Egypt, thanks to the Suez Canal, provided a maritime route for the British to reach their colonies in countries like India, Australia, and New Zealand, making it an invaluable asset for the British. Ensuring the security of the Suez and controlling the canal was vital for the British, and Egypt played a crucial role in this regard<sup>9</sup>. The successful Turkish War of Independence, which began in Anatolia in 1919, also bolstered nationalist movements in Egypt. Said Zaghoul and the Wafd Party, in particular, are symbolic figures of Egyptian nationalism.

In 1922, Britain granted nominal independence to Egypt in order to prevent the growth of these movements. They made Fuad, the son of Egyptian Khedive Ismail Pasha, the king of Egypt. Following the death of King Fuad in 1935, King Farouk, who succeeded him, was not particularly well-liked by the nationalist population in Egypt. The people viewed him as 'a puppet of England.' In this context, the 1936 elections were won by the Wafd Party, and in a way, Egyptian nationalists came to power. Both this situation and Italy's attack on the Abyssinian region in 1936 softened England towards Egyptian nationalists. Even though England did not withdraw its troops from Egypt, it reduced its pressure on Egypt by signing the 1936 Treaty. According to the 1936 Treaty signed between England and Egypt, England would withdraw from Egypt but could maintain troops at

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8 Uçarol 2008, pp. 198-99.

9 Çimen 2016, p. 230.

the Suez Canal. If there was any attack on Egypt, England would protect Egypt. In accordance with the treaty, England stationed 10,000 soldiers and 400 fighter pilots in the region, citing the need to secure the Suez Canal. Immediately after the treaty, capitulations were lifted in Egypt, and Egypt became a member of the League of Nations<sup>10</sup>.

After the 1936 Treaty, relations between Egypt and Türkiye had improved, and during that period, Türkiye's Tevfik Rüşti Bey assumed the presidency of the League of Nations, even providing support to Egypt in becoming a member of the League of Nations<sup>11</sup>. However, with the outbreak of World War II, the situation in Egypt took on a different character. The anger of the Egyptian people towards Britain was so intense that they followed a policy of wishing for the victory of the Nazis during World War II, believing that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend.' This policy gave the British an opportunity, and they used the Egyptian people's sympathy for Germany as a pretext to remove King Farouk from the throne, especially in the context of support for Axis powers. Thus, Britain, in its own way, taught a lesson to the Egyptian people and monarchy, leaving nearly 100,000 British soldiers in Egypt and effectively maintaining a presence in the region. After the end of World War II, nationalist movements, fueled by the British reluctance to withdraw their troops from Egypt, had resurged in the region. Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War that began with the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Arab world suffered a significant defeat at the hands of Israel. This defeat further tarnished the monarchy's image in Egypt, played a substantial role in its overthrow, and paved the way for nationalist and Islamist movements.

The officers within the Egyptian army, influenced by the defeat against Israel in 1948, realized that the existing monarchy was not sustainable. They began preparations to put an end to the monarchy and revoke the 1936 treaty. On July 23, 1952, a group of officers, led by Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser, initiated a military action. Calling themselves the 'Free Officers Movement,' these officers surrounded the British forces stationed in the country and started attacking British institutions. The long-standing anger towards Britain had finally erupted<sup>12</sup>. General Naguib issued an ultimatum on July 26, 1952, demanding that King Farouk abdicate the throne. Monarchy in Egypt came to an end, and the House of Kavalalı ceased to exist. Initially, General Muhammad Naguib assumed the presidency, but he was not particularly idealistic in his political career. Eventually, the

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10 Uçarol 2008, p. 442; Armaoğlu 2010, p. 259.

11 Özgiray 1996, p. 7.

12 Cleveland 2008, pp. 338-41.

Revolutionary Command Council led by Abdul Nasser, who had become the brain behind the Free Officers Movement, took over General Naguib's position. Naguib's rising popularity among the people caused concern for Nasser, and differences of opinion emerged between them regarding the nature of the revolution in Egypt. However, to maintain control, Nasser initiated a secret struggle against Naguib and ultimately ended his political career by accusing him of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, whom he saw as a threat to the regime. After this, Naguib spent the rest of his life under house arrest<sup>13</sup>.

In 1954, Nasser came to the stage with the hope of realizing his grand ambitions, winning the presidency with 99.95% of the vote. One of the leaders Nasser looked up to was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He regarded Atatürk as a hero and a role model for future Arab leaders<sup>14</sup>.

Furthermore, the Turkish army, which had won the independence war against imperialism, served as a source of inspiration for the new Egyptian government. After the Free Officers' Coup, General Naguib, the Chief of the General Staff, expressed his hope that the Egyptian army would also carry out successful endeavors for the homeland, stating, 'I hope that the Egyptian army will do for its homeland what the Turkish army has done.' The new leadership of Türkiye and Egypt communicated extensively about the details of the secular state practices in Türkiye, and Egypt decided to implement the same secular state system as in Türkiye<sup>15</sup>.

### **The Middle East Command Project and Türkiye-Egypt Relations (1950-52)**

When we look at Türkiye-Egypt relations between 1950 and 1960, it can be observed that besides the direct relations between the two countries, there were also significant events that influenced and sometimes determined these relations. On one hand, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to lead the entire Middle East in the struggle against Western powers, and on the other hand, the DP (Democratic Party) government in Türkiye, which was aligned with Western powers and often acted in concert with them, frequently found themselves in opposition.

After the end of World War II, the presence of the British army with 200,000 soldiers in Egypt rekindled Arab nationalism in Egypt. As a

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13 Cleveland 2008, p. 341.

14 Karpat 2017, p. 190.

15 Vatan Newspaper, November 24, 1954, p. 1.

response to Egypt's stance, Britain signed an agreement with the Egyptian government and pledged to withdraw its troops from Egypt by September 1949. Britain maintaining a certain number of troops in Egypt would provide the possibility of entering and meeting its needs in case of a potential war in the country. However, as relations between Britain and Egypt were returning to normal, the Sudan issue emerged between the two countries. Egypt objected to Britain granting independence to Sudan, claiming that Sudan was its own territory in terms of the integrity of the Nile (Şahin 2016, p.86). After the defeat of the Arab world in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Britain made it clear that it did not want to withdraw from Egypt, and on the other hand, the Arab nationalism accelerated by the 1948 Arab-Israeli Wars prompted Britain to seek different methods to stay in the region.

The Middle East Command Project served as an exit strategy for the problems Britain faced in Egypt. The primary reason behind Britain's desire to stay in Egypt was the expansionist policy pursued by the USSR over Türkiye, Greece, and Northern Iran. To remain influential in Egypt and consequently in the Middle East, Britain proposed the Middle East Command Project. The first step in this regard was the termination of its mandate over Iraq on January 15, 1948. Following this move, Britain aimed to sign joint defense agreements with countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, but due to actions against it in some of these regional countries, it was unable to carry out this step. In 1948, Britain's withdrawal from Palestine and the establishment of Israel there further complicated the balance of power, making the Middle East Command Project even more important for Britain. According to this project, the USA, Britain, France, Egypt, and Türkiye would maintain a force called the Middle East Command in the Suez Canal region<sup>16</sup>. Although the USA was initially hesitant about this project, with the outbreak of the Korean War and the vital importance of British bases in the Middle East for the USA in that war, the USA decided to participate in the Project<sup>17</sup>.

Türkiye's desire and goal to become a part of the Western Bloc as of 1950 brought about security concerns as well. The expansionist policies of the USSR and communism became one of the fundamental problems of the time, endangering Türkiye's security. Therefore, NATO membership was of great importance to the Democratic Party Government, both for its own prestige and for securing its safety in its Middle East strategy. The main reasons for Türkiye's desire to join NATO were seeing NATO as a bulwark

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16 Dağver, 1951, p.1; Şahin 2016, p. 87.

17 Kürkçüoğlu 1972, p. 34.

against the Russian threat, concerns that it would lose the aid it received under the Truman Doctrine if it did not join NATO, and the belief that the development of democracy would only gain momentum through NATO membership<sup>18</sup>.

In line with this foreign policy adopted by the Democratic Party (DP), Türkiye's desire to become a NATO member in order to secure Western support and guarantee its own security, and as a result, sending a 4,500-strong military unit to Korea, were indications of its support for the United Nations' approaches against aggression and its expectation of similar support.

In early 1951, the British Government promised to support Türkiye's NATO membership on the condition that Türkiye participates in a unified Middle East Command. According to the offer, the United Kingdom would support Türkiye's NATO membership, but Türkiye would also join the proposed command. Türkiye accepted this offer. Speaking in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) on July 20, 1951, Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü stated that after joining NATO, Türkiye would assume a defensive role in the Middle East, emphasizing the region's importance for the protection of Europe both strategically and economically<sup>19</sup>.

The Western and Turkish press emphasized that Türkiye and Greece's entry into NATO and their active role in the establishment of a Middle East Command would serve as an indicator of the free and democratic world's response to Soviet pressure. This view was even reflected in the Dutch press, which was initially skeptical of Türkiye's NATO membership<sup>20</sup>. However, at that time, the general consensus in Türkiye was that, regardless of whether the Middle East Command was established, Türkiye's strategic position would ensure its NATO membership<sup>21</sup>. Until 1952, Türkiye was assigned by the United Kingdom, France, and the United States to defend the region from the Turkish-Soviet border to the Suez Canal, as part of the planned Middle East Command with its headquarters in Cyprus<sup>22</sup>.

The Middle East Command, or as it was later referred to with changing circumstances, the Middle East Defense Council, can be likened to an adaptation by NATO for the Middle East region. According to the plan, this

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18 Balcı 2017, p. 126.

19 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, July 21, 1951, issue 9687, pp.1-4.

20 Vatan Newspaper, September 22, 1951, p. 3.

21 Kılıç 1951, p. 3.

22 Vatan Newspaper, November 25, 1951, p.1.



command consisted of four states: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Türkiye. Arab countries and British colonial states could also join if they wished. A Turkish general would lead the organization's joint forces. Greek forces, on the other hand, would be included in General Eisenhower's Western European Command. The Command would not only plan the defense of the region in the strategic field but also control the allied air, land, and sea forces. The areas the Command would defend included Türkiye, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, territories in the Persian Gulf, Yemen, and Aden<sup>23</sup>.

The Soviet Union sent a note to Türkiye regarding this issue, stating that Türkiye should not provide assistance to the Middle East Command and warning that if assistance was provided, the Soviet Union would not remain indifferent.

In response to this note, Türkiye pointed out the contradictions in the Soviet Union's foreign policy practices. In other words, while the Soviet Union was promoting peace propaganda on one hand, it couldn't understand why it opposed the establishment of defense organizations on the other<sup>24</sup>.

E.W. Noel Charles, a British intelligence officer operating in Eastern Anatolia, assessed the Middle East Command and Türkiye's perspective on this project as follows: "There is no doubt that the Turkish government aims to secure the ability to make an irrevocable request for aid in the event of an attack on Türkiye while simultaneously working to enhance the prospect of NATO membership"<sup>25</sup>.

Türkiye, aiming to establish a political presence in the Middle East, believed that the dispute between Britain and Egypt posed a significant threat to Middle East peace. Türkiye thought that the dispute between Egypt and Britain could only be resolved if the allies filled the region instead of British officers in Egypt<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, Türkiye did not hesitate to be part of the Four Powers Declaration on November 10, 1951. This declaration was issued by Türkiye, the United States, Britain, and France. Despite the opposition of Arab states, the declaration stated that the Middle East Command would be established.

The declaration also included the following<sup>27</sup>:

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23 Kılıç 1951, p.3.

24 Gürün 1991, pp. 308-09.

25 Yeşilbursa 2010, p. 68.

26 Yeşilbursa 2010, p. 73.

27 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 11, 1951, pp. 1-5.

- That the purpose of the Middle East Command (MEC) is to establish peace, just like the United Nations (UN).
- The vital importance of MEC for a free world.
- That MEC will ensure security in the region and defend the region as a whole through cooperation.
- That MEC will provide military training and support to states that assist in security and defense in the region.
- That in case of operations, member countries of MEC will develop joint operational plans.
- That MEC will be an allied command, not a national one.
- That international special agreements will be made in the formation and activities of MEC.
- It was stated that MEC will not work for the benefit of any state.

Another frequently mentioned news item in the media of the time, as previously mentioned, is the issue of a Turkish general serving as the supreme commander of the Middle East Command<sup>28</sup>. According to the United States, Türkiye would play the most active role in military terms. In the event of a problem arising in the region, neither Britain nor the United States would be in a position to send troops<sup>29</sup>.

During the period when the Middle East Command Project was discussed, Türkiye's NATO membership was also a subject of debate. Türkiye stated that NATO membership and the establishment of the Middle East Command should be regarded as separate issues and believed that the goals of both organizations were different. In Türkiye's foreign policy perspective, NATO was seen as a good guarantee against the communist threat posed by the USSR, while the Middle East Command was considered a project that would allow Türkiye to have influence in the Middle East as part of the Western alliance<sup>30</sup>.

The idea of the Middle East Command was not well-received in Egypt and the Arab world. Apart from Iraq, Arab states expressed their preference to handle their own defense in their regions with the support of the UN,

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28 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 11, 1951, p. 5.

29 Dokuyan 2023, p. 5.

30 Sönmezoglu 2006, p. 43.

stating that they did not want Türkiye and Western countries to even come to their regions for defense purposes<sup>31</sup>.

The Egyptian government, on the other hand, did not warmly embrace the Middle East Command Project but before rejecting it, it made the Sudan issue a bargaining chip<sup>32</sup>.

Therefore, on October 13, 1951, a conference was convened in Ankara, and four states issued a note to the Egyptian government, stating that if Egypt joined the Middle East Command, concessions would be made on the Sudan issue, and it was mentioned that once the British withdrew their troops from the Suez Canal, the troops of Britain, France, the United States, and Türkiye would take their place. In the discussions held in Ankara, the Egyptian Parliament did not approve joining the Middle East Command Alliance<sup>33</sup>.

Thus, the Egyptian government officially rejected the proposal to join the Middle East Command<sup>34</sup>. In the same month, discussions began on a Middle East Command without Egypt at a conference held between Washington, Paris, London, and Ankara. In these discussions, it was concluded that Türkiye would serve as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East in the establishment of a Middle East Command<sup>35</sup>.

One of the factors contributing to the Egyptian government's opposition to the Middle East Command Project was the belief that if this project were realized, it would be impossible to eliminate Israel, and that the project would benefit Türkiye and Israel more than Egypt<sup>36</sup>. The Muslim Brotherhood Party, the second-largest party in Egypt, also proposed declaring war on Britain and abolishing the 1936 Treaty.

These ideological and political reactions in Egypt also led to practical actions. During the disturbances in Ismailia, Egyptians attacked British homes and vehicles, and British soldiers, intervening in the crowd, opened fire, resulting in the deaths of 10 people and the injury of 80 others. In Cairo, the public gathered in the squares and attacked the Turkish consulate. Turkish properties in Cairo were looted<sup>37</sup>.

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31 Vatan Newspaper, November 10, 1951, p. 3.

32 Coşar 1951, p. 3.

33 Vatan Newspaper, October 13, 1951, p. 4.

34 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 16, 1951, p. 1.

35 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 22, 1951, p. 1.

36 Ülman 1968, p. 207.

37 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 13, 1951, p.1.

In the newspaper *El Dawa*, which is the organ of the Muslim Brotherhood Society, articles opposing Türkiye appeared with statements like “Türkiye is the Israel of the Middle East, and there will be no peace for Arab states until its head is crushed. It must be destroyed.” Similar sentiments were observed in many Egyptian newspapers<sup>38</sup>.

The publications in the Egyptian press, especially those against Türkiye, were met with significant outrage in the Turkish public. When the issue was discussed in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Istanbul University Turkish Student Union also held a special meeting and expressed their condemnation of the situation<sup>39</sup>. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a note to the Egyptian government, condemning their official authorities for remaining indifferent to the anti-Türkiye news in the Egyptian press<sup>40</sup>. Ankara Radio also criticized the Egyptian press’s articles against Türkiye and emphasized the belief that the Egyptian people would not remain indifferent to this situation<sup>41</sup>.

This situation even led to the mobilization of the Turkish public and media regarding the location of a beauty contest at the time. The European beauty contest was being organized in Paris, and there were plans to hold a contest in Egypt. Concerns were raised that Türkiye might not participate in the contest in Egypt and that changing the location of the competition would be much better<sup>42</sup>. Ultimately, Türkiye’s request was deemed justified, and the competition was held in Naples.

Türkiye, after being accepted in principle to join NATO at the NATO Ministerial Council meeting held in Ottawa from September 16 to 21, 1951, was officially invited to sign the NATO agreement on February 16, 1952. Türkiye had finally gained official recognition as a European country and not just as a Muslim Middle Eastern nation. As a result, it became an official member of NATO.

With Türkiye’s NATO membership, its perspective on the Middle East Command Project took on a different dimension. Starting from 1952, the MEC project was transformed from a military command into a planning and defense organization. On June 18, in a memorandum submitted by the United Kingdom to the United States, it was decided to change MEC to

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38 *Vatan* Newspaper, October 17, 1951, p.1; *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, October 17,1951, p.1.

39 *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, October 25, 1951, p.1-3.

40 *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, October 26, 1951, p.1-5.

41 *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, October 26, 1951, p.1-5.

42 *Cumhuriyet* Newspaper, October 29, 1951, p.1-3.

the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO)<sup>43</sup>. Egypt's negative view of MEC, divisions within the Arab world, and different perspectives between the United States and the United Kingdom on the matter became obstacles to the project's realization. A conference was held in Malta on October 20, 1952, to address this issue, and the following decisions were made<sup>44</sup>:

- The impossibility of establishing MEC,
- The potential for creating such a command structure in a region with unstable political struggle and economic conditions, which could lead to more dangerous consequences,
- The proposal to establish an international staff organization with the participation of senior commanders from regional states,
- The new organization to have no military forces under its command, but to prepare plans for countering the red threat if it arises,
- The establishment of a planning committee for conducting political negotiations,
- Each member of the new committee to have predefined responsibilities,
- Identification of deficiencies in Middle East defense and determination of how to address them.

Egypt also refused to participate in this organization. The United States accepted that both the MEC and MEDO organizations had failed and stated that Middle Eastern countries saw Zionism, not communism, as the threat. The Manchester Guardian newspaper, published in the UK, stated in its issue dated June 3, 1953, that a defense system established without Egypt and Middle Eastern states would be meaningless, that Arab states could not participate in a joint structure with Israel, and that no other pact would be meaningful unless Middle Eastern states formed their own defense pact<sup>45</sup>. After the failure of Middle East projects was accepted, the United States began to support the process of establishing another pact under Turkish leadership. This inclination initiated the process of the Baghdad Pact.

During this period, Türkiye attempted to repair its strained relationship with the Egyptian government but was unsuccessful. In fact, one of the most significant indications that the crisis between the Egyptian government and the Turkish government was ongoing was Egypt's decision to deport

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43 Dokuyan 2023, p. 5.

44 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, October 24, 1952, pp. 1-6.

45 Dokuyan 2023, p. 5.

the Turkish ambassador, Fuat Hulusi Tugay, on January 4, 1954. The Egyptian government attributed this action to the behavior of the Turkish Ambassador, citing instances such as the exclusion of anyone from the Egyptian government from an invitation on December 21, 1953, the Turkish ambassador not shaking hands with the Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister at an exhibition opened on January 2, 1954, and engaging in an argument<sup>46</sup>.

Especially, the 1955 Türkiye-Iraq Treaty, which marked the initial stage of the formation of the Baghdad Pact, further strained Türkiye's already deteriorating relations with Egypt. The famous Egyptian newspaper "El Cumhur" portrayed the Türkiye-Iraq treaty as a blow to Arab unity, an act of treachery, and emphasized the disadvantages of making such a treaty with a non-Arab state<sup>47</sup>. While the Nasser government and public opinion in Egypt adopted a negative stance towards Türkiye and rejected Menderes' visit to Cairo, Türkiye continued to pursue a persistent and positive policy towards Egypt<sup>48</sup>.

After 1950, one of the key issues that stood out in the relations between the Egyptian government and the Turkish government was a perception problem. While Türkiye perceived the USSR as a major threat at the beginning of the Cold War era, Egypt saw the USSR not as a threat but rather as an enemy of the imperialist world and a friendly ally. Issues such as Türkiye's NATO membership, the Middle East Command project, the formation of pacts involving Türkiye, the Suez Crisis, and the Cyprus issue have brought Türkiye and Egypt into conflict. In this context, the first step in the policies pursued by Türkiye, which believed that its only option was the Western Bloc, was the Middle East Command project. Although Türkiye did not initially warmly embrace the Middle East Command Project, it eventually approved it because it believed it could pave the way for NATO membership. Egypt opposed this project, interpreting it as a return of imperialist powers to their former colonial territories. Egypt also saw Türkiye's support for this project as making it a "pawn of the West." With Türkiye's accession to NATO, the Middle East Command project became effectively sidelined for Türkiye, but in theory, it remained a project that Türkiye always supported to avoid breaking away from the Western Bloc and as part of its policy of "active neutrality."

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46 Cumhuriyet Newspaper, January 5, 1954, p. 1.

47 Vatan Newspaper, January 15, 1955, p. 7.

48 Vatan Newspaper, January 22, 1955, p. 6.

However, this project has strained the historically rooted friendship and closeness between Türkiye and Egypt and led Egypt to perceive Türkiye as the spokesperson for the West in the Middle East.

**ABBREVIATIONS:**

USA	United States of America
MEC	Middle East Command
MEDO	Middle East Defense Organization
TBMM	Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi = Grand National Assembly of Türkiye
DP	Democratic Party (of Türkiye)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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