
Containing Nationalist Aggressiveness through Strategic Partnership: The Settlement of the Aegean Dispute in the Early Cold War

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**Paper Presented at the 2021 ASN World Convention, 5-8 May 2021
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Introduction

The Aegean dispute has been a constant preoccupation of diplomacy and a recurring source of tension in the Greek-Turkish relations. The topic has yet to be resolved, contributing to the instability of bilateral relations between the two states for many years. Especially due to the more hardened and nationalistic policies of both states over the past few years, it has become a stumbling block to the development of amicable relations between Greece and Turkey.¹ The dispute, which can be basically summarized as ‘a set of interrelated controversial issues between Greece and Turkey over sovereignty and pertinent rights in the area of the Aegean Sea’,² has always been of vital concern for the Greek and Turkish authorities, as well as intellectuals and ordinary citizens in Greece and Turkey. The domestic forces - including public opinion, political interest groups, and the press - in both countries have mostly demonstrated a keen interest in the issue, which frequently narrows the possibilities of state and non-state actors to find diplomatic paths to a substantial solution. Despite domestic pressures fanned by nationalistic rhetoric from the Greek and Turkish press, however, the two countries handled their conflicts over the territorial waters in the early 1950s.

There is a rich literature that has uncovered how international and domestic factors have been closely intertwined in the historical evolution of the Greco-Turkish Aegean disputes. Yet the issue of how Greek and Turkish governments settled the disputes concerning the exercise of sovereignty and related rights on the waters of the Aegean Sea in the early 1950s has received little attention in scholarly studies. In this period, the Greek and Turkish governments did not only design initiatives to defuse tension regarding the repeated fishing disputes between the two nations but they could also stop the instances of the breach of territorial waters escalating into diplomatic standoffs. Such an incident, commonly known as the Fethiye Incident, erupted in August 1953, when the Turkish authorities arrested the crew of a Greek gunboat in Turkish territorial waters for ‘disrespecting the Turkish flag’. Anti-Turkish demonstrations in Greece

¹ Jon M. Van Dyke, “An analysis of the Aegean Disputes under International Law,” *Ocean Development & International Law* 36, No:1 (2005), p. 63.

² Petros Siousiouras and Georgios Chrysochou, “The Aegean Dispute in the Context of Contemporary Judicial Decisions on Maritime Delimitation,” *Laws* 3, No. 1 (2014), pp. 12-49.

that began after the arrest and public outrage in Turkey over the flag issue sparked concerns that the incident, which was partly complicated by long-standing Aegean tensions and nationalist sentiments in both countries, could damage the Greek-Turkish relations. Inflamed public opinion on both sides might not only wreck the strategic partnership between Greece and Turkey but it might also damage the bloc cohesion but the two governments remained interested in easing tension quickly and achieved to keep the issue out of their plans to form a closer security alliance.

By using the case of the Fethiye Incident, this paper aims to provide more nuanced explanations to questions of how Greek and Turkish political leaders were able to play down potential diplomatic crises over the Aegean and contained nationalist aggressiveness through a strategic partnership in the early Cold War period. To better grasp the primacy of strategic alliance in promoting and imposing methods for the settlement of the incident, the paper consults a wide range of primary and secondary sources that both state and non-state actors produced. Before exploring how strategic partnership functioned as a useful framework for the prevention of conflict escalation during and after the Fethiye Incident, the following section provides a brief account of the Greek-Turkish partnership from the early-to-mid 1950s, with an emphasis on their policies regarding the Aegean Sea.

The Cold War Partnership and the Settlement of Aegean Disputes

Greece and Turkey have rarely enjoyed good relations. The centuries-long encounters between the Greek and Turkish nations point to complex relations that have been triggered and defined mostly by territorial disputes and wars, and maintained by occasional military alliances. The early Cold War period was one of these occasional moments of strategic partnership, though it was a unique example in terms of its scope and scale. The Greek and Turkish commitment to developing and maintaining a strategic alliance after the Second World War cannot be considered only as a result of their bilateral diplomatic initiatives but must be situated in the context of the Cold War struggle. Even though the Greek-Turkish partnership dated back to 1930, it took on a new chapter and significance with the rise of the Cold War struggle in general and the Soviet threats to Greece and Turkey in particular.³ Neither Greece nor Turkey had the sufficient capacity to counter the Soviet aggression. The presence of a common threat created a considerable common ground and many areas of mutual interest on the issues of security between the two states. They acted together to develop closer relations with the Western countries for diplomatic support.⁴

The Soviet threat that Greece and Turkey were subjected to also attracted the attention of the Western alliance to the strategic importance of Greek-Turkish cooperation against the Soviet Union and its allies in the Balkans. For the US-led Western Bloc, Soviet control over Greece and Turkey would give the Soviets a major strategic gateway between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and would increase their influence over the Middle East. This possibility served as a deciding factor in the issuing of the Truman Doctrine, which was formulated to halt

³ Gözde Emen-Gökatalay, “A Curious Case of Failing Sports Diplomacy in the Early Cold War: The Mediterranean Friendship Tournament (1949),” *Soccer & Society* 21, No.7 (2020), pp. 788-801; Fotios Moustakis, *The Greek-Turkish Relationship and NATO* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 30.

⁴ İ. Aytaç Kadioğlu and Egemen Bezci, “The Mystery of Intra-alliance Intelligence: Turkey’s Covert Operations in the Cyprus Conflict,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, No.4 (2020), p. 641; Richard Clogg, “Greek-Turkish Relations in the Post-1974 Period,” In *The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the 1990s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), p. 13.

the communist sphere of influence.⁵ In 1947, Greece and Turkey became joint beneficiaries of the Truman Doctrine and then of the Marshall Plan.⁶

The outbreak of the Korean War raised the importance of the bloc cohesion and stability in the early 1950s and urged Greece and Turkey to develop higher levels of collaboration. Greek and Turkish leaders were under the pressure of the Allied Powers to boost their military ties and improve diplomatic relations amid growing rifts with the Soviet Union.⁷ Though cooperation was being increasingly robust, there were conflicts that could easily become an impediment to strengthening Greek-Turkish ties. To further consolidate their partnership, Greece and Turkey had to make concessions in the first years of the 1950s on many of the thorny issues. The efforts of Greek and Turkish authorities worked, and a breakthrough was recorded in the Greek-Turkish relations.⁸ As renowned historian Richard Clogg has argued, the early 1950s was the period that marked ‘the high point in Greek-Turkish relations during the post-war period’.⁹ They were admitted to NATO at the same time in 1952, and on 9 August 1954 they agreed on a defense pact together with Yugoslavia.¹⁰ Throughout the period, settling the disputes in the Aegean Sea was one of the thorny issues that the Greek and Turkish authorities tackled successfully.

This paper runs contrary to the conventional wisdom that has tended to argue that the origins of the dispute about the territorial waters between Greece and Turkey over the Aegean seabed could be traced back to the early 1970s.¹¹ Although limited, there are studies that

⁵ Barn Kayaoğlu, “Strategic Imperatives, Democratic Rhetoric: The United States and Turkey, 1945–52,” *Cold War in the Aegean* 9, No.3 (2009), p. 327–328; Joseph C. Satterthwaite, “The Truman Doctrine: Turkey,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 401, No.1 (1972): 77-78.

⁶ Andrew Mango. “Greece and Turkey: Unfriendly Allies,” *The World Today* 43, No:8/9 (1987), p. 145.

⁷ Brett Ashley Leeds and Michaela Mattes, “Alliance Politics during the Cold War: Aberration, New World Order, or Continuation of History?,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24, No.3 (2007), pp. 195-198.

⁸ The Greek-Turkish relations got closer immediately after the Second World War. The common Soviet threat developed the cooperation between Greece and Turkey. The ongoing Greek Civil War (1946-1949) escalated the fear of the Soviet threat in both states. The communist victory in Greece would create a domino effect leading to political instability in Turkey, too. These two states made an alliance against the common threat. But the Greek-Turkish diplomatic relations encountered its most productive period in the early 1950s. A strategic partnership was achieved between these two states, witnessing one of the heydays of their political history. Their accession to NATO in 1952 became a major turning point for their partnership. Turkey and Greece started to share even their military strategies and performed joint military exercises under the NATO commands in Izmir and Thrace. They even narrated the possibility of a federation among them. Both the Papagos government in Greece and the Menderes government in Turkey promoted pro-friendly relations between Greece and Turkey in this period. There were visits at the highest level in both capitals in the first few years of the 1950s.

⁹ Richard Clogg, “British Perspectives on Greek-Turkish Relations in the Aftermath of World War II,” *The Aegean Sea after the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 17.

¹⁰ Andrew, “Greece and Turkey: Unfriendly Allies,” p. 145.

¹¹ Tozun Bahçeli, “Turning a New Page in Turkey’s Relations with Greece? The Challenge of Reconciling Vital Interests,” in *Turkish–Greek Relations: The Security Dilemma in the Aegean* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 98; Christos Kassimeris, “NATO and the Aegean Disputes,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 24, No.2 (2008), p. 165; Vassalotti, Julia, “Rough seas: The Greek-Turkish Aegean Sea Dispute and Ideas for Resolution,” *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review* 33 (2010), p. 389; Alexis Heraclides, “The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the Aegean,” in *Imagined Enemies* (New York: Houndmills, 2010), p. 77; Şule Anlar Güneş, “Aegean Sea Territorial Waters Issue,” in *Turkish*

examine the issue of fishing rights as early examples of political friction between the two states regarding the Aegean issues. But they have also argued that a shift has occurred in the Greek-Turkish disputes over the Aegean Sea from trivial and non-political topics such as fishing rights to territorial conflicts in the 1970s.¹² The re-examination of fishing disputes in the 1950s, however, shows that the issue of fishing had always been elevated as an aspect of territorial and economic rights in the Aegean Sea and a sovereignty matter in the Greek-Turkish relations.

Greece and Turkey have a longstanding tradition and history in the fisheries and maritime sector. The late 1940s witnessed an increase in the attempts of Greek and Turkish authorities to modernize the fishery through the introduction and provision of modern fishing materials. In the Turkish case, for instance, the authorities convened committees and advisory panels and conducted public meetings for the development of industrialized fishing in Turkey.¹³ In one of these meetings, the Turkish government informed the public that part of the Marshall Aid would be used to support the fishery sector, with an aim of increasing export.¹⁴ To regulate and increase fish production in Turkey, the government prepared detailed reports about the fish resources. In one of these reports, it was noted that there were rich fishery resources in the Turkish territorial waters in the Aegean Sea such as Ayvalık, a town on the northwestern Aegean coast of Turkey, which is very close to the Greek island of Lesbos.¹⁵

Due to the special circumstances of the Aegean Sea, which is ‘a semi-closed sea with particular geographic and geologic features, a large number of islands, islets, and rocks’,¹⁶ the fishing conflicts such as the breaches of territorial waters were very common in Greek-Turkish relations. Some of these incidents caused a temporary rift between the two. Such was the case in 1931 when Turkey sent a diplomatic note to Greece demanding that the Greek government prevented the “illegal” fishing of Greek islanders on Turkish territorial waters.¹⁷ The illegal fishing occurred particularly in the areas like Ayvalık and Bodrum, where the coasts of both states were extremely close to each other, and there were abundant fishing grounds.¹⁸ According to the Turkish documents, the fishing problems between the Greek and Turkish people dramatically increased in the second half of 1951. Zeyyat Mandalinci, MP for the province of

Foreign Policy (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 307; Erol Kalkan, “The Longstanding Dispute between Turkey and Greece: the Aegean Issue,” *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari İncelemeler Dergisi* 28 (2020), p. 168.

¹² John O Iatrides, “NATO and Aegean Disputes: The Cold War and After,” In *The Aegean Sea after the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 32-46; Chiara M. Della Mea, “The Fisheries Issues in the Aegean Sea,” in *The Aegean Sea after the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 152-157.

¹³ “Balıkçılığımız: Balıkçılığımızın Gelişmesi Neye Mütevakkıftır? Alınması Greken Tedbirler,” *Akşam*, 20 April 1948, p. 4; “Balıkçılığın Kalkınması: Bu Hususta Mühim Tedbirler Alınıyor,” *Zafer*, 16 December 1949, p. 2.

¹⁴ “Balıkçıların Dün Yaptıkları Toplantıda Görüşülünler,” *Zafer*, 10 december 1949, p. 2.

¹⁵ 13 June 1948: Republican Archive of the Prime Ministry (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi) [hereafter BCA], 490 01 1452 17 2, pp. 10-11.

¹⁶ Siousiouras and Chrysochou, “The Aegean Dispute in the Context of Contemporary Judicial Decisions on Maritime Delimitation,” p. 18.

¹⁷ Enis Tulça, *Atatürk, Venizelos, ve Bir Diplomat Enis Bey* (Istanbul: Simurg, 2003), p. 50.

¹⁸ According to the British document, such incidents were likely to continue in the geographically entangled area of gulfs, jutting headlands, and scattered islands because the territorial waters at the Turkish coast opposite were ‘far richer in fish’ than the seas around the local fishing in the Greek islands. For details, see 21-23 January 1954: British National Archives Foreign Office [hereafter FO], 371/112835.

Muğla, one of the Turkish cities on the coast of Aegean Sea, very close to the Greek islands, accused the Greek islanders of “smuggling” fish from Turkish territorial waters.¹⁹ Although there were nationalist deputies in the Turkish government such as Mandalinci, who used a rhetoric of nationalist populism and accused the Greek fishers, the high-ranking ministers of the Turkish government pursued secret negotiations with their Greek counterparts over the fishing issues including free fishing rights between Greece and Turkey.²⁰

The Greek and Turkish governments tried to keep the negotiations secret, but a leak occurred, and both Greek and Turkish newspapers published the details of the negotiations. The negotiations faced public backlash in Greece and Turkey.²¹ For instance, on 27 August 1952, a Greek newspaper *Vradyni* published the protests of the fishers living in the Greek islands Lesbos and Crete. These islanders protested the Greek government’s acceptance of exporting 3.000 tones fresh fish from Turkey in accordance with the secret negotiations. This would, according to Greek newspapers, leave Greek fishers jobless, so be a ‘death blow’ for the Greek fishing.²² Also, the oppositional party in Turkey heavily protested the ongoing meetings and considered the idea of free fishing against the national interests of Turkey. Although the pro-government newspapers in Turkey presented the draft as being compatible with ‘the common interests’ of Greek and Turkish nations,²³ the efforts of the opposition in Turkey worked. The Turkish public regarded the draft as ‘a concession of the Turkish government to Greece’ and protested the draft in general.²⁴ The choice between strategic interests and the demands of public opinion and national aspirations became a dilemma for the Greek and Turkish governments. Despite reactions and protests, both Greek and Turkish governments opted for the former option and continued the fishing negotiations. The Fethiye Incident took place at such a period when two states aimed to resolve their conflicts over the territorial waters.

The Fethiye Incident

The Greek-Turkish relations were frequently embroiled by repeated incidents involving the confiscation of local Greek fishing vessels and the arrest and imprisonment of crews in the early Cold War period.²⁵ Even on the same week of the Fethiye Incident, another fishing incident occurred in Fethiye. According to the report of the British Consul of Rhodes three small fishing vessels from the Greek islands (two from Kalymnos and one from Rhodes) were caught by the Turkish patrol boat, while they were fishing in the Turkish waters. The case was reported by the British officials as: five members of the two of the boats of these fishers were arrested and taken to Bodrum [the nearest town center] and two Greeks in the third sank their boat and escaped by swimming off to a nearby islet.²⁶ Although such incidents served as a

¹⁹ 16 May 1952: Minutes of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Cerideleri) [hereafter TBMM Zabıt Cerideleri], D: 9, Y: 3, C: 15, B: 73, O: 1, pp. 262-263.

²⁰ 16 May 1952: TBMM *Zabıt Cerideleri*, D: 9, Y: 3, C: 15, B: 73, O: 1, p. 262.

²¹ Nihat Erim, “Türk-Yunan Münasebetleri,” *Ulus*, 30 November 1952, p. 1

²² 5 September 1952: BCA, 030 01 102 636 4, p. 3: “Yunan balıkçılığını çok sarsacak ve balıkçı gemilerini işsiz bırakacak olan 3000 ton taze balık ithalini aynı şekilde telgrafla protesto etmişlerdir.”

²³ “Türk-Yunan Müşterek Balık Avlama Tasarısı,” *Zafer*, 27 June 1952, p. 1: “Ege’deki Yunan adalarını saran bütün karasuları avcılığa açık bırakılacak.”

²⁴ “Balık Anlaşması Tenkidediliyor,” *Ulus*, 7 August 1952, p. 1

²⁵ 21-23 January 1954: FO 371/112835.

²⁶ 21-23 January 1954: FO 371/112835.

reminder that even the minor problems had the disturbing potential of plunging to a more serious crisis in the Greek-Turkish relations, the Greek and Turkish authorities were familiar with tackling these fishing disputes. But the Fethiye Incident was not one of these usual incidents. It could have sparked strong nationalist sentiments on both sides of the Aegean. That is why it is vital to explore the details of the incident in understanding how both states defused the crisis when the risk that the reactions of Greek and Turkish nationalists could be detrimental to the Greek-Turkish alliance was high.

Air France Flight 152 was an international passenger flight with 8 crew members and 34 passengers, most of whom were from the Middle East. It was flying from Paris to Tehran, with two stopovers in Rome and Beirut.²⁷ When it was flying the Rome-to-Beirut leg, at a little over two in the morning, on the night of August 2 to 3, 1953, the aircraft piloted by Captain Raymond Terry and co-pilot Jacques Steens suffered a strong shock of multiple engine failures. The plane, which left Rome at 10:32 p.m., was off the coast of Turkey and was losing altitude dangerously, deprived of two out of four engines.²⁸ As the plane quickly lost altitude, the pilot decided to attempt an emergency landing off the Turkish coast near Fethiye near a coastal lighthouse called Kızılada rather than landing in a mountainous area.²⁹ Although the engines stopped, the captain kept the plane in the air until he reached the Turkish coast.³⁰ Thanks to the calmness and skill of the crew, there was no panic among the passengers and they had time to put on their life jackets. The sea was calm and the plane landed impeccably in the water close enough to shore.³¹ The passengers evacuated the aircraft through the four emergency exits. They initially remained on the wings of the aircraft, which floated for more than an hour before sinking. Members of the crew and a few passengers set out to swim for the shore less than half a mile away to trigger help. In the meantime, the lighthouse keepers rushed to plane crash to rescue survivors with their boat. Then custom officers and fishers also arrived at the accident site and picked up surviving passengers and crew.³² The crash killed four people, who were drowned when they tried to swim to the shore.³³ The residents of Fethiye provided shelter, food, and other necessary items to the survivors.³⁴

²⁷ Stéphanie Meyniel, “Le 3 août 1953 dans le ciel : Amerrissage d’urgence d’un Constellation d’Air France au large de la Turquie”, *Air Journal*, 11 August 2011. (<https://www.air-journal.fr/2011-08-03-le-3-aout-1953-dans-le-ciel-amerrissage-d%E2%80%99urgence-d%E2%80%99un-constellation-d%E2%80%99air-france-au-large-de-la-turquie-533532.html>).

²⁸ The accident was reported as: “08/03/1953,02:28, “Off Fethiye Point, Turkey,” Air France, Rome - Beirut, Lockheed L- 749A Constellation, F-BAZS,2628,42,4,0. The No. 3 engine broke away from the aircraft following severe vibrations causing loss of control of the No. 4 engine and necessitating a ditching 1.5 miles from the coast. Failure in the flight of a propeller blade. Four passengers drowned. For details, visit <https://lms.pps.net/courses/14878/files/62768>.

²⁹ “Rapport d’enquete sur l’accident survenu: Fethiye (Turquie), la 3 aout 1953, a l’avion Lockheed 749 A-F.BAZS, dela Campagne Nationale Air France,” *Journal officiel de la Republique Française annexe administrative*, 16 March 1954, pp. 149-154.

³⁰ “Air France Crash Landing On Turkish Coast Kills 4,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 August 1953, p. 3.

³¹ Tom Masterson, “4 of 42 Die as Airliner Belly-Lands,” *The Globe and Mail*, 4 August 1953, p. 1.

³² https://aviatechno.net/constellation/suivi_matricule.php?mat=F-BAZS.

³³ “Aegean Sea Plane Crash Kills 4 of 42 Passengers: Two Oregon Residents,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1953, p. 26; “Mishap off Turkey: Four Drowned While Swimming to Shore,” *South China Morning Post*, 8 August 1953, p. 7

³⁴ “Kuru Gürültü”, *Cumhuriyet*, 13 August 1953, pp. 1, 3.

On August 4, an Air France plane with a group of experts flew to the Greek island of Rhodes to determine the cause of the crash-landing of the plane off the coast near Fethiye and to pick up the survivors.³⁵ The same day, a Greek shore patrol motor carried the group of Air France experts from Rhodes to Fethiye for the investigation of the crash and the transfer of the survivors.³⁶ The Greek motor was not hoisting a Turkish flag when it arrived at Fethiye. The local harbormaster and the police chief in the port of Fethiye asked the Greek captain to raise a Turkish flag. But the captain rejected, and a quarrel occurred. The Turkish police arrested the captain and his radio officer. They were held at Izmir for an investigation. This story was blown up into a major outrage by the Greek press. The pro-government newspaper *Kathimerini* accused the Turkish officials of assaulting the Greeks. It reported the incident as:³⁷

GREECE-TURKEY: Rhodes, 7 – The coast guard is continuing its investigation into an incident provoked by Turkish authorities of Makri (Fethiye) against the captain and crew of a Greek patrol boat sent to Turkey to pick up the surviving passengers and crew of an Air France aircraft that had crashed off the Turkish coast nearby. According to testimony by crew members and passengers of the French aircraft who were brought to Rhodes on a Greek ship, the Turkish authorities behaved in a completely aggressive manner with unprecedented barbarity toward the captain and crew of the Greek patrol boat, after they stormed aboard and forced the captain to raise the Turkish flag on the Greek ship, while at the same time the crowd on shore stoned the ship for four hours. The events occurred as follows: At 6.50 a.m. on Tuesday, August 4, the Greek patrol boat anchored (to pick up the passengers and crew of the aircraft) in the port of Makri. As soon as the local harbor master and police chief came aboard, they ordered the captain in no uncertain terms to rectify his mistake in not raising the Turkish flag. The captain then replied that no naval craft ever raised a foreign flag.

Kathimerini's protest attracted the attention of the British officials in Greece. In the British document, a passage from *Kathimerini* was quoted as: "It is a fact that at the time Greeks and Turks were enemies, their neighboring relations were better than today when they are supposed to be friends". The British report also included the news of *Vima*, which described the Fethiye Incident as the sign of 'ridiculous chauvinism' of Turkey.³⁸ Such articles could have caused national anger toward Turkey in Greece.

The protests of the Greek newspapers also caught the attention of the Turkish press. The Turkish newspapers grew increasingly frustrated with the Greek press's coverage of the event. They regarded 'the overreactions' of the Greek newspapers as 'intentional acts' of the anti-Turkish nationalists in Greece to damage the Greek-Turkish partnership.³⁹ Moreover, they accused the Greek newspapers of hiding the details of the incident and misleading the public in Greece.⁴⁰ Indeed, the story was more complex than it was told by some of the Greek

³⁵ "Plane to Pick Up Crash Survivors," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 August 1953, p. 3.

³⁶ "Insult to Turks Alleged: Greek Crew is Reported Held for Dishonoring Flag," *The New York Times*, 7 August 1953, p. 3.

³⁷ <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/16303/august-8-1953/>

³⁸ 13-17 August 1953: FO 371/107494.

³⁹ "Yunan Gazetelerinin Yakışsız Neşriyatı," *Cumhuriyet*, 12 August 1953, p. 1: "Bütün gazeteler Fethiye hadisesini ele alıp büyüterek aleyhimizde çok çirkin yazılar yazıyorlar."

⁴⁰ "Kuru Gürültü," p. 3.

newspapers. The Greeks were arrested for allegedly dishonoring the Turkish flag. Basing on its Turkish sources, *The New York Times* summarized the incident as:⁴¹

The altercation occurred when the Greek gunboat entered Fethiye harbor with seven Air France experts sent from Athens to determine the cause of the crash-landing Monday of an Air France Constellation off the coast near Fethiye, in which four passengers lost their lives and three were injured. Turkish port authorities requested the Greek captain to hoist the Turkish colors while he was in Fethiye and were reported to have supplied a Turkish flag after the captain had said he had none abroad. The Turks charge that the captain thereupon tossed the flag to his radio officer who in turn allowed a crew member to drop it and step on it.

Then, they were arrested.⁴² The coverage of the arrest by Greek media only exacerbated the fury of Turkish newspapers. After giving the details of the flag issue, one of the popular Turkish newspapers *Cumhuriyet* criticized the Greek newspapers by saying: “Here it is the real ‘Fethiye Incident’ and due to this incident (!) Greek newspapers grabbed their pens and started publications, without neglecting to represent Turks as primitive, brutal, cruel, and tyrant”.⁴³

Despite the fierce battle waged by the Greek and Turkish newspapers that aggravated tension and confrontation more by accusing each other, the governments remained calm and did not breed anger. The incident occurred at a period when both Turkish and Greek authorities tried to fully develop their partnership and form closer military ties toward establishing a collective security system with Yugoslavia in line with the Second Balkan Pact. To end the tension quickly, both governments promoted prospects for mediation and peaceful settlement of the dispute. Greece requested the release of the Greek detainees and Turkey immediately responded to the Greek call and released the captain and the crew.⁴⁴ After the release, Stefanos Stefanopoulos, the Greek Foreign Minister, publicly announced that the problem was solved.⁴⁵ Finally, the survivors of the plane crash could be transported to Rhodes, from where they were flown to Paris four days after the accident.⁴⁶ To further ease the suspicions and worries of the Greek and Turkish people, who were agitated by the media coverage of the incident, the authorities also declared that the two countries agreed to carry out a mutual investigation of the event and they would punish the ones who were guilty of causing the tension in Fethiye. This

⁴¹ “Turks Release 2 Greeks: Ship Captain and Radio Man Accused of Insulting Flag,” *The New York Times*, 8 August 1953, p. 4.

⁴² The missing part of the story in the Greek newspapers also misled the British authorities in Greece. The British Consul of Rhodes, in his report to the British Embassy in Ankara, found Turkey guilty and asked “how can the Turks permit themselves, with no apparent provocation, to act in ways which can all too easily undo all that the Treaty of Ankara [1930] is intended to achieve.” Meanwhile, however, when he learned the flag issue, the British Consul finished his report, dating January 1954, as such: “We fear that in our letter 1031/6/53 of August 13 we were over kind to the Greeks.” This Turkish act, i.e. the arrest of these Greeks, was not without apparent “provocation.” For more details, see 13-17 August 1953: FO 371/107494 and 21-23 January 1954: FO 371/112835.

⁴³ “Kuru Gürültü,” p. 3: “İşte ‘Fethiye Hadisesi’ bu ve bu hadiseden (!) dolaydır ki Yunan gazeteleri kaleme sarılmışlar ve Türklerin ne iptidailiklerini, ne vahsiliklerini, ne zulüm ve istibdad temayüllerini ihmal etmemecesine neşriyata başlamışlardır.”

⁴⁴ “Turks Release 2 Greeks: Ship Captain and Radio Man Accused of Insulting Flag,” p. 4.

⁴⁵ “Yunan Dışişleri Bakanının Beyanatu,” *Cumhuriyet*, 12 August 1953, p. 1

⁴⁶ https://aviatechno.net/constellation/suivi_matricule.php?mat=F-BAZS.

announcement even pleased the Greek and Turkish newspapers, and they published it with positive words.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, there were still several Greek columnists who criticized Turks harshly.⁴⁸ For example, in an editorial in *Prósfyges Kósmos*, Michaíl Kalogeropóulu attacked on Turks for their attitude towards Greeks and questioned the post-war alliance of Greece with Turkey.⁴⁹

A few days later, however, an earthquake occurred in the Greek islands, which allowed the authorities to underscore durable alliance and to manage and defuse the conflict more easily. The earthquake crowded the Fethiye Incident off the front page in both countries. With Turkey's display of 'sympathy and neighborly feelings', the earthquake led to an improvement in Greek-Turkish relations which was seriously tested just a week ago.⁵⁰

The Unfriendly Relations between Greece and Turkey and the Policy Change for the Aegean Issues

Athens and Ankara enjoyed a period of tranquility and calm waters in the first years of the 1950s. In the autumn of 1954, the Cyprus issue altered the Greek-Turkish relations and it sounded the death knell for their good neighborly relations.⁵¹ It overshadowed the efforts for strengthening the alliance, and the aggressive rhetoric and mutual mistrust began quickly to shape the Greek-Turkish relations towards the mid-1950s. These developments caused the strategic alliance between Greece and Turkey in the early Cold War period to be replaced by conflicts of national interest that led to decades-long setbacks in their diplomatic relations. The fast and steady deterioration of the relations between Greece and Turkey posed new questions and challenges for all the Greek-Turkish disputes, including the Aegean conflict. In 1954, NATO wanted to establish a patrol-boat base on Leros, a Greek island in the southern Aegean Sea. The base would increase the Western security system in the eastern Mediterranean and stop any attack by the Soviet navy in case it would pass the Turkish Straits. The Turkish government opposed the base since it would enhance the Greek presence in the Aegean, which had already increased after the Greek control of the Dodecanese in 1947. The base would also help Greece have easier access to Cyprus, which the Turkish authorities perceived as another potential threat that would imperil the Turkish national interests. According to the report of the American official, Greece's act of raising the Cyprus issue in the United States recently before NATO's proposal considerably reduced the chance of Turkey's approval for the Leros plan and Turkey vetoed the proposal.⁵²

At the same time, the Turkish government did not ratify the draft of the Convention for Free Fishing in Aegean. These developments indicated that distrust between Greece and Turkey had already begun to grow in 1954. This distrust reflected in the Aegean disputes. In October 1954, a Turkish patrol caught seven Greek fishers with 400 kilos of fish and a vase of historical value around the Çeşme coast. Although the fishers attempted to escape, the patrol captured

⁴⁷ "Apelythi o Tourkos Ypallilos Dia Ta Eis Varos Nafton Mas Epeisodia", *I Ídi*, 11 August 1953, p. 4; "Hadiseye Sebebiyet Veren Yunanlı Memurlar İşlerinden Alındılar", *Cumhuriyet*, 12 August 1953, p. 5.

⁴⁸ "Oudeís Lógos Anisychías," *Mesogeiaós*, 13 August 1953, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Michaíl Kalogeropóulu, "Oi Tourkoi einai Adiórthotoi", *Prósfyges Kósmos*, 15 August 1953, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Lewis, *Turkey* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1955), p. 147.

⁵¹ Alexis, "The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the Aegean," p. 69.

⁵² Iatrides, "NATO and Aegean Disputes: The Cold War and After," pp. 42-43.

them.⁵³ As more incidents took place in the following months, the Turkish government decided to increase the penalty given to “foreign smugglers.” The government drafted a law that would prohibit the fishing of Greeks in Turkish waters and brought it to the National Assembly in February 1955. The law not only increased the fines to TL 50,000 but also allowed the confiscation of fishing material and equipment, such as boats and engines.⁵⁴ The arrest of more Greek fishers paralleled legal measures. For example, Turkish officials arrested three Greek fishers around Gökova in April 1955. At the same time, Turkey increased its fishing activities both in the Aegean and Black Sea.⁵⁵ More importantly, the Turkish government made efforts to increase territorial waters to twelve miles from three miles in July 1955. To this end, a meeting was held in the Minister of Economy and Commerce in which nine other ministries participated. According to the Turkish government, this step seemed to be “inevitable” for the preservation of the fish sources and national wealth of Turkey.⁵⁶

These actions and decisions of the Turkish government regarding fishing and territorial waters were the results of the setbacks in Greek-Turkish diplomatic relations. The Turkish policymakers did not want a dispute over the Cyprus issue with Greece and the UK until 1955.⁵⁷ The activities of the *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* (EOKA)⁵⁸ for *Enosis* and the armed struggles in 1955 led Turkey to pay closer attention to the island and its Muslim populace.⁵⁹ Particularly, after the EOKA’s attack on the police station in the Turkish part of Cyprus on 21 June 1955, which wounded fourteen Turkish Cypriots, the EOKA’s direct threat began to be felt more by the Turks.⁶⁰ As the Turkish government tried to defend its interests on the island, thousands of Turks marched through streets to voice their opposition to the struggles and the increasing influence of Greece on Cyprus. In September 1955, Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey held meetings in London to find a permanent solution to the Cyprus issue. Meanwhile, with the encouragement of the DP government, a group of Turkish citizens attacked the Orthodox population, along with other non-Muslim groups, in Istanbul and Izmir on September 6 and 7. The attackers looted non-Muslim stores and homes, destroyed their property, and raped several women.⁶¹

After the events, the two NATO allies came close to the war. To react to organized mob attacks directed primarily at the Greek minority in Istanbul, the NATO-equipped Greek armor units in Thrace prepared to advance on the Turkish border. Then the political leadership in

⁵³ “Yunan Balıkçıları,” *Akşam*, 25 October 1954, p. 2

⁵⁴ “Karasularımızda Balık Avı,” *Akşam*, 18 February 1955, p. 2

⁵⁵ “Sahillerimizde Balık Avlayan Üç Yunanlı Yakalandı,” *Akşam*, 10 April 1955, p. 2.

⁵⁶ “Karasularımız 12 Mile Çıkartıyoruz,” *Akşam*, 6 July 1955, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Şaban Halis Çalış, *Turkey's Cold War: Foreign Policy and Western Alignment in the Modern Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 118-119.

⁵⁸ EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) was a nationalist paramilitary organization of Greek Cypriots that fought a campaign for the end of British rule in Cyprus and the union of Cyprus with Greece (*Enosis*).

⁵⁹ Kadioğlu and Bezci, “The Mystery of Intra-alliance Intelligence: Turkey’s Covert Operations in the Cyprus Conflict,” p. 641.

⁶⁰ Kadioğlu and Bezci, “The Mystery of Intra-alliance Intelligence,” p. 643.

⁶¹ Dilek Güven, “Riots Against the Non-Muslims of Turkey: 6/7 September 1955 in the Context of Demographic Engineering,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (2011), pp. 12-14; Bülent Gökay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey, 1920–1991 Soviet Foreign Policy, Turkey and Communism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 78.

Athens ordered the tanks to remain at their bases.⁶² Yet, Greece withdrew from NATO training exercises in the eastern Mediterranean for the first time to protest the attacks in Turkey.⁶³ Known as the Istanbul pogrom, the events did not only prompt hundreds of Greeks, Jews, and Armenians to flee Turkey but also further estrangement between Greece and Turkey. It was no accident, then, territorial waters became a more sensitive issue after the pogrom. According to the broadcast of the state radio of Athens, for instance, on 9 December 1955, one Greek fishing vessel, while sailing through the Turkish territorial waters, was fired on by Turkish coastguards, and one member of the crew was killed.⁶⁴

Conclusion

This study examined a multidimensional account of the Aegean dispute in the early Cold War. Greece and Turkey were allies not because of the common threat of the Soviet Union and other communist countries but also the desire of both countries to be included in the Western Bloc. In this atmosphere where an alliance was mutually beneficial to both parties, the Aegean dispute emerged as a key issue that reflected and transformed Greek-Turkish relations. Since maintaining this alliance was a priority in the immediate aftermath of the war, both governments did their best to find a common ground to solve their problems in the Aegean. For example, the Fethiye Incident could have disrupted postwar dreams of regional harmony. Although it prompted a short-lived outrage in both countries, the governments were quick to respond to it. While other issues, the Athens incident in 1949⁶⁵ and the Cyprus issue in the 1950s, led to massive street demonstrations, the Fethiye incident did not. But a year after the incident, the Cyprus issue quickly soured the relations between Greece and Turkey. It damaged the chances for a permanent strategic alliance between the two states. By the end of 1955, the Greek-Turkish rivalry reappeared in the arena of interstate politics. With the political gulf between Greece and Turkey continuing to divide in the mid-1950s, similar incidents in the Aegean Sea created more serious problems.

⁶² Iatrides, "NATO and Aegean Disputes: The Cold War and After," pp. 35-36.

⁶³ John G. Hatzadony, "Greece and NATO: A Study of Policy Divergence and Alliance Cohesion," (Master Thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 1996), p. 34.

⁶⁴ 9-12 December 1955: FO 371/11769.

⁶⁵ For the details of the incident, see Emen-Gökatalay, "A Curious Case of Failing Sports Diplomacy in the Early Cold War," pp. 788-801.