

Turkish Foreign Policy and The Return of Greece to NATO Military Command under the Rogers Plan

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In my opinion, one of the most significant events in Turkish foreign policy is the return of Greece to NATO military command under the Rogers Plan. I am inclined to believe that this event can be regarded as one of the important failures, if not the most important failure, of Turkish Foreign Policy. To me, there are two reasons as to why this event can be regarded as an important failure: (1) Turkey losing its trump card on a critical neighbor, which was gained as result of Cyprus invasion (2) Decision-making by one individual by leaving the other elites of the state and bureaucracy in the dark and accepting the soldier's word. To argue for these reasons, it is necessary to recall the events that led up to the occurrence.

Greece withdrew its units from NATO forces in the Southern Mediterranean in 1964, and following the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, it withdrew from NATO's military leadership while remaining a member of its civilian organization and agencies. This withdrawal created both problems and opportunities for different actors. It was a problem for NATO, since it left a gap in the alliance's southeastern flank. It was also a dilemma for Greece since it ceded control of the Aegean Sea to Turkey. On the other side, Greece's exit provided Turkey with a historical trump card because there is no voting mechanism in NATO, only consensus decision-making, which meant that Turkey could block Greece's re-acceptance to its advantage. With this, Turkey might have used this trump card to block a return to the pre-1974 arrangements that virtually placed the entire Aegean Sea under the responsibility of Greek command. In addition, Turkey might have used its veto power to secure more equitable Aegean command and control arrangements upon Greece's return. All those opportunities and problems, however, were turned upside down by Roger's plan. On October 17, 1980, Rogers paid a visit to Evren and informed him that Greece will hold elections, and that if the socialist party wins, Greece may lose its ally status indefinitely; thus, Greece should rejoin NATO before the elections. Considering the security interests of Turkey could be better served if Greece was a part of NATO, Evren

agreed to Greece's return. General Rogers gave Evren a 'soldier's word' in case the goodwill of Turkey disregarded by Greece. NATO assembled the Defence Planning Committee on October 20, 1980, immediately after receiving word from Evren, and accepted Greece's return. Roger's plan was titled 'Temporary Regulation on NATO Command and Control in The Aegean Sea' consisting of four articles. However, on December 8, 1981, the newly elected Papandreou government declared that they would not accept the agreement because it was not binding. When General Rogers met Evren two years later, he said he was sorry about the whole issue.

So, why is this event important in the history of TFP¹? First, one can see that Turkey lost a trump card over a critical actor in the international arena, owing primarily to an individual making an important foreign policy decision while keeping the other decision-makers in the dark. Even Turkey's permanent representative to NATO, Amb. Osman Olcay stated that he was unaware that Turkey had lifted its veto and that he should first contact Ankara, when Greece's return was discussed in the Defence Planning Committee. When Evren was compiling his autobiography, he noted that Greece had lost absolute command of the Aegean Sea and that pressure on Turkey had weakened. True, Greece lost absolute control over the Aegean Sea command, but Turkey could not use its veto power to gain more control over the Aegean Sea command at the time, and an agreement between countries that could favor Turkey could not be reached on the issue. NATO was ultimately given command of the Aegean Sea. Second, we can see that decision of one individual, without consulting foreign policy bureaucracy or other elites can be absurdly unhealthy and short-sighted. The most humiliating thing about this whole issue is that the idea of 'soldier's word'. It is hard to justify that when two actors of the international system make an agreement on an issue, they completely disregard the international diplomacy and international law. This reminds us why formal and written agreements, instead of words, between actors are important. Combination of decision-making by one actor, losing a trump card on an important actor, and informal agreement between two individuals based on soldier's word makes the event unique in the history of TFP.

¹ Turkish Foreign Policy

