



# THE INSTITUTE *of* TURKISH STUDIES

## TURKEY DURING WORLD WAR II

**Dr. Onur Isci , Georgetown University**



**Thursday, April 10  
12:45-2:30 PM  
CCAS Boardroom  
(ICC 241)  
Georgetown University**

Shortly after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, as the possibility of a Soviet advance towards the Straits emerged in the offing, Turkey began fast reverting to its old imperial attitude, when Istanbul's foreign policy had been dictated largely by the Sultan's fear of Russia. The state of wartime affairs between Ankara and Moscow gradually fell in sharp contrast with the cordial atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s, when the first principle of Turkish foreign policy had been the alliance with the Soviet Union. A close examination of the Turkish Prime Ministerial Archives (BCA) and the parliamentary minutes of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) reveals that Turkey's fundamental policy consideration throughout the war had been a German victory over Russia provided that this was followed by a British victory over Germany. In other words, Turks very much desired to see another Brest-Litovsk status quo: two separate wars involving Germany, conducted independently by Britain and the USSR without cooperation. Rather than a wily strategy of capitalizing on war, the underlying factor, which guided the Turkish state in its quest to remain neutral, was the revival of Russophobia amongst the ruling circles in Ankara. There had never been a moment during the war for neither the Allies nor the Axis to depart Turkey from its neutrality unless some form of guarantee had soothed its Russian complex. Overall, my paper points to a common fallacy in historical scholarship that construes Turkey's peculiar neutrality as an attempt to cash in on both warring blocs. On the contrary, I argue that Turkey's neutrality was precarious, rather than active or cunning, and that, in the face of growing pressure from Moscow between 1939 and 1945, Ankara admitted the need for stronger allies in Western Europe. As the war came to an end, Turkish leadership ultimately stumbled back into the Middle East while seeking to deter Russian encroachment in the region.

**Onur Isci** has a PhD in History from Georgetown University (2014), where he currently holds a Royden B. Davis fellowship. Isci wrote his doctoral dissertation on Ankara's relations with Moscow between 1936 and 1947; and has published various articles on Russian and Turkish history within the past decade. He holds an MA degree in International Relations from Bilkent University (2005); and a second MA degree in History from Miami University (2007). Since 2012, he has been teaching at Georgetown, offering several surveys and seminars on the history of the Cold War and the modern Middle East.

***A Light Lunch will be served***



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