

More Catholic than the Pope: Turkish competition with ‘little Russia’ in Libya, 1953–1957

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Drawing extensively on declassified American, Turkish, and British archives, this study explores the Turco-Egyptian rivalry in Libya and its place in the intra-Western alliance relations in the 1950s. It shows how the Turkish government, acting ‘even more Catholic than the Pope’ in Libya, was so committed to fending off the Egyptians that it became frustrated by what it perceived as British and American apathy and appeasement toward Egyptian sway in Libya. Turkey’s pro-Western competition with Egypt in Libya shows that, although Britain and the United States had more direct and tangible economic and military interests in Libya through oil discoveries and military bases, neither was as antagonistic toward Egypt as Turkey was. While Turkey mobilised all of its already scant resources at its disposal to compete with Egyptian influence in Libya, it faced several obstacles, from lack of cooperation by its Western allies, alienation of Turks of Libyan origin who had been away from Libya in ‘exile’ in Turkey for a long time, to a language barrier.

More Information

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