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January 26, 1945THE BALKAN STATES AND THE TURKISH STRAITSI. STRATEGIC INTERESTS

Like Turkey and the Soviet Union, the States of Southeastern Europe have strategic interests of the greatest importance in the region of the Turkish Straits. Historically, these states--Greece and Bulgaria, Rumania and Yugoslavia, as well as Albania and parts of Hungary--were subject to the Ottoman Empire. Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania and Yugoslavia [Serbia], achieved their independence in the course of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

Land routes from the Balkan region via Belgrade, Sofia and Salonica lead to the Straits, as does the Danube route to the Black Sea. More particularly the Balkan routes to the Straits are: 1) The lower course of the Danube to the Black Sea and thence to the Straits; 2) The valley of the Maritsa River via Adrianople to the Straits; 3) The Morava-Vardar valley from Belgrade to Salonica and thence overseas to the Straits; and 4) The Via Egnatia from Durazzo to Salonica and Adrianople to the Straits, or overseas from Salonica. 1/ Over these land and sea routes the Straits may be attacked from Europe. But over them as well the Balkan region may be attacked and invaded. Control by a Great Power over the Balkan routes to the Straits would lead to domination of the Straits. The basic Turkish strategic interest in the preservation of the independence of the Balkan States is concerned with protection of the Straits. Control over the Straits by a Great Power, on the other hand, might well threaten the independence of the states of Southeastern Europe. Indeed, in many

respects

1/ See Colonel E. Bakirdzis, "La valeur stratégique de la Grèce pour le Proche Orient," Affaires Danubiennes, No. 5 (1939), 231-48; "Les puissances et la nouvelle Turquie," ibid., No. 6 (1940), 315-335; "Les pays du Bas-Danube; Etude géopolitique," ibid., No. 7 (1940), 61-84.

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respects, it may be said that the independence of the states of Southeastern Europe depends on a practical solution of the problem of the Straits which would at once preserve the freedom of commerce through the Straits and promote the peace and stability of the states of the Balkan region.

II. ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF THE BALKAN STATES

The economic interests of the states of Southeastern Europe in the Straits vary, though all are vitally concerned with freedom of commerce. Bulgaria and Rumania, for example, as Black Sea states, have an outlet to the open seas only through the Turkish Straits. While Bulgarian tonnage passing through the Straits has never been large, Rumanian tonnage has exceeded an annual average of 500,000 tons and in 1939 was about 850,000 tons, sometimes surpassing the tonnage of the Soviet Union in the Straits. 2/ Yugoslavia also appears little interested commercially, although its tonnage has not been negligible, while that of Hungary has been even less than that of Yugoslavia. In contrast, Greece has had a very large tonnage passing through the Straits, averaging about 2,000,000 tons in the ten years preceding the outbreak of the present war, and ranking among the first three commercial powers using these waters. Although Turkish trade, as such, with the countries of Southeastern Europe has been small, Turkish tonnage in the Straits has naturally been very large. An indication of the significance of the Straits to the various Balkan countries is shown by the following table: 3/

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- 2/ The Bulgarian tonnage was not listed in 1913, but the Rumanian tonnage was more than 350,000 in that year.
- 3/ This table is compiled from League of Nations, official Turkish and other sources. For more complete tables see T-515. The Problem of the Turkish Straits.

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BALKAN SHIPING IN THE TURKISH STRAITS
(Registered Net Tonnage)

666 State	1924	1928	1932	1937	1939	1940	1941 (Jan.-May)
Albania							
Bulgaria	87,183	103,509	91,143	180,379	179,798	181,482	18,183
Greece	827,000	779,950	2,469,396	1,648,211	930,142	526,682	225,464
Hungary	71,960				15,998	13,153	
Rumania	364,134	468,183	643,038	709,536	845,136	546,816	175,180
Yugoslavia	36,173	22,780	124,841	57,438	79,977	30,170	5,570
Total	1,386,450	1,374,422	3,328,418	2,595,564	2,051,051	1,298,303	424,397
Percentage	18 o/o	14 o/o	19 o/o	20 o/o	26 o/o	40 o/o	12 o/o

III. POLICIES

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III. POLICIES OF THE BALKAN STATES CONCERNING THE STRAITS

A. The Balkan States and the Straits

The policies of the states of Southeastern Europe with respect to the Straits and Turkey have varied according to their position and their interests. In the period of 1919-1922, Greece, under British aegis, sought to gain a position on the coast of Asia Minor and even aspired to hold Constantinople. With the exceptions of Hungary and Bulgaria, they all approved the Straits Convention of Sèvres in 1920 and that of Lausanne in 1923. On the other hand, Turkey, Rumania and Bulgaria rejected a Soviet proposal at Lausanne whereby the Black Sea was to become a "mare clausum of the littoral Powers," since Soviet Russia would clearly be the dominant naval power in the Black Sea. 4/

In the years which followed the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey's relations with the Balkan States underwent a fundamental transformation. Turkey signed a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia in 1925 and renewed it in the fall of 1933. Turkey and Bulgaria were bound by a treaty of neutrality, arbitration and conciliation in 1929 and renewed it in the fall of 1933. Commercial treaties with the Balkan countries were signed with Bulgaria (1930), Greece (1930, 1934), Rumania (1930), and Yugoslavia (1933). Greek-Turkish relations had so far improved by October 1930 that a treaty of neutrality, conciliation, arbitration and friendship was concluded. By September 13, 1933 these two ancient enemies signed a treaty guaranteeing their common frontiers and providing for common representation at certain international conferences. 5/

Partly

4/ See Cmd. 1814 (1923), 250-53, 263, 275-76. A so-called "Black Sea Pact" for control of the Straits by the riverain powers has been proposed a number of times. The American Government, like Great Britain, has consistently taken the position that the Straits and the Black Sea are not solely the concern of the riverain powers. See Gabriel Hanotaux, La Guerre des Balkans et l'Europe, 1912-1913 (Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1914), 192-200; N. Dascovici, La question du Bosphore et des Dardanelles (Geneva, Georg, 1915), 299-300. H.N. Howard The Partition of Turkey, 283-97

5/ For text see R.J. Kerner and H.N. Howard, The Balkan Conferences and the Balkan Entente, 1920-1935 (Berkeley, University of California, 1936), Document XIII, p. 231.

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Partly in the interest of the security of the Straits as well as in that of its general political security, the Turkish Government was much concerned with programs for Balkan union or federation. Both Turkish and Greek political leaders played a significant rôle in the organization and direction of the semi-official Balkan Conferences (1930-1934) in which unofficial representatives of Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, Turkey and Yugoslavia took part. On February 9, 1934, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Rumania--the latter two being members of the Little Entente with Czechoslovakia--signed the Balkan Pact by which the signatories were pledged to defend each other against attack by another Balkan State (Bulgaria or Albania). 6/

The Turkish Government submitted a formal request for revision of the Lausanne Straits Convention to the Conference on the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments at Geneva on March 24, 1933. 7/ The next year, fearful of the possible designs of Fascist Italy in the Near East, and particularly in the region of the Straits, the Turkish Government informally communicated to the Balkan States its desire for obtaining the right to fortify the zone of the Straits. 8/ On June 1, 1934, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Tevfik Rüstü Aras, submitted a resolution to the Conference asking it "to enter without delay upon an exhaustive study of the problem of security," for the purpose of arriving, especially

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6/ For text see ibid., Documents XIV, XV, pp. 232-37.

7/ League of Nations, Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Series B. Minutes of the General Commission. Volume II. December 14th, 1932--June 29th, 1933, Section 92.

8/ See Tevfik Rüstü Aras, 10 ans sur les traces de Lousanne (Istanbul, Akşam Matbaasi, 1935), 248-53.

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in Europe, "by general or regional agreements based on the principles set down in the Treaty of Locarno and that of the Balkan Entente, at such solutions as might be best calculated to make it possible to conclude [agreements] for the reduction and limitation of armaments."

When Italy began its march into Ethiopia in 1935, Turkey, considering itself threatened at least by implication, followed the lead of Great Britain in applying economic sanctions against Italy and in supporting the system of collective security under the Covenant of the League of Nations. In the fall of 1935 Great Britain asked the several Balkan States along the shores of the Mediterranean if they would place their posts at the disposal of a Great Power acting under the authority of the League of Nations. In December 1935 the Turkish Government, along with Greece and Yugoslavia, and "in concert with its Balkan allies, replied that in the contingency contemplated it would fulfil the obligations under the Covenant." ^{9/} Subsequently the Ankara government asked the British Government to furnish it with reciprocal assurances, "which were duly conveyed." Similar assurances were also given to the Greek and Yugoslav Governments.

Perhaps the Turkish Government felt that Great Britain's attitude toward revision of the Convention of the Straits would be altered in Turkey's favor. It was not until April 10, 1936--after the German forces had entered the Rhineland--that Turkey made a formal request for revision of the Lausanne Convention, however, with a genuine possibility of success. ^{10/} There is evidence that the Turkish Government, in the interest of its own security, was prepared to act alone if its request were opposed by the Powers, although it followed the policy of pacific procedure in revision of the Lausanne Convention. The British and Soviet Governments hastened to accede to the calling of a conference to consider the problem of revision, the French Government was somewhat reluctant, the Japanese Government was relatively disinterested, and Italy was not at all sympathetic with the idea of revision.

With

- ^{9/} Ethiopia No. 2 (1936). Dispute between Ethiopia and Italy. Correspondence in connection with the application of Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. January 1936. Jmd. 5072.
- ^{10/} Stephen Heald and J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, Documents on International Affairs (London, Oxford, 1937), 645-48.

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With the exception of Rumania, the Balkan States received the Turkish request with favor. Provided the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea were permitted to refortify, Greece was not opposed to the Turkish move. Yugoslavia favored the Turkish request, and was especially impressed that the Turkish Government had chosen the regular channels of diplomacy and the organs of the League of Nations through which to press its desires. The Bulgarian Government announced its agreement, making known that it would "not oppose the Turkish request for remilitarization" of the Straits. The Bulgarian press and the government, no doubt, felt that a useful precedent might be set for peaceful revision of the Treaty of Neuilly. The Rumanian Government, however, was fearful that the entire question of treaty revision would be raised in the Balkan region and especially that the act of Turkey would "sooner or later have very important consequences for the fate of the Balkan Entente and for the entire policy of southeastern Europe. The Turkish Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Numan Menemencioglu, had to make a special trip to Bucharest to clear up any Rumano-Turkish misunderstandings. When the Balkan Entente met on May 4, 1936, it appears that Greece, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Turkey, acting together, agreed on the terms whereby Turkey would be supported in its request to refortify the region of the Straits. Greece was to have the right to refortify the Aegean Islands, while Rumania received a Turkish guarantee that the members of the Balkan Entente would be consulted prior to the undertaking of any action.

The Convention of Montreux, signed on July 20, 1936, 11/ restored Turkish sovereignty over the Straits, with the full right of remilitarization of the region. Freedom of commerce in both peace and war was affirmed, even if Turkey were a belligerent, provided the commercial vessels committed no hostile acts within the Straits. Belligerents were prohibited from using the Straits in war time, except when acting under the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations, or under the terms of a regional--the Balkan Entente--pact, to which Turkey was an adherent and which was registered with the

League

11/ Turkey No. 1 (1936). Convention regarding the Regime of the Straits with Correspondence Relating thereto. Montreux, July 20, 1936. Cmd. 5249.

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League of Nations. 12/ The Convention was a signal victory for Turkey, for the members of the Balkan Entente, and for the peaceful revision of treaties under the procedure of the League of Nations. At the time, it also seemed to offer the prospect of collaboration between the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France against any threat to peace in the Eastern Mediterranean.

B. Turkey, the Balkans, the Straits and the War

The Balkan Entente held together during the Munich crisis of 1938, although there was little prospect of its being effective if and when a genuine test should come. Although the Balkan Entente had achieved some regional economic and cultural agreements, it fell short of a common foreign and military policy which could be applied beyond the common Balkan neighborhood.

On the eve of the outbreak of the war, Turkey was moving cautiously in the orbit of Great Britain and France, while Great Britain, following the destruction of Czechoslovakia, offered to support Greece and Rumania, and communicated this declaration to Turkey. At the same time, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, appeared to be trying to organize a Turco-Balkan group for the preservation of the security of the region of the Straits and the Black Sea. 13/

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12/ Article XIX declared: "Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not, however, pass through the Straits except in cases arising out of the application of article 25 of the present Convention, and in cases of assistance rendered to a State victim of aggression in virtue of a treaty of mutual assistance binding Turkey, concluded within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and registered and published in accordance with the provisions of article 18 of the Covenant."

13/ See New York Times, February 8, 1939. At the closing session of the Montreux Conference, July 20, 1936, Litvinov acknowledged the positive accomplishments of the Conference: "The Conference has recognized, although in an insufficient way, the special rights of the riverain states in the Black Sea in connection with the passage of the Straits, as well as the

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A few weeks after the beginning of the war, on the occasion of the visit of the Turkish Foreign Minister, M. Saraceglu, to Moscow, the Soviet Government proposed a similar "Black Sea Pact" concerning the Straits. V. M. Molotov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, explained the Soviet position concerning the Straits in an address to the Supreme Soviet on November 1, 1939, 14/ in which he denied any suggestion of altering the Montreux Convention for the purpose of establishing a "privileged position as regards the Straits", but did declare that "the subject at issue was the conclusion of a bilateral pact of mutual assistance limited to the regions of the Black Sea and the Straits." Such a mutual assistance pact, Molotov argued, would help to prevent armed conflict with Germany and the U.S.S.R. would have a guarantee that Turkey would not allow the warships of a non-Black Sea power into the Black Sea. Turkey rejected these proposals and on October 19, 1939 signed a pact with Great Britain and France.

The Balkan region did not become a scene of war until October 1940. At the last meeting of the Council

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13/ Con't. special geographical situation of the Black Sea in which the general conceptions of the absolute freedom of the seas could not be entirely applied." A.N. Mandelstam, La politique russe d'accès à la Méditerranée aux XXe siècle (Paris, 1934), 796-98, wrote: "It is now legitimate to envisage the future for a national Russia reborn in an incompletely pacified world....It will not perhaps be too bold to suppose that the new Russia, renouncing the dream of Constantinople will unite with Turkey and the other riverain states of the Black Sea by lines powerful enough to defend their common right to a special situation in the Straits, a situation guaranteeing to all the riverains of the Pont-Euxine the full security of the measures which they have constructed on the enchanting shores."

14/ For text of Molotov's address see the New York Times, November 1, 1939. See also D.J. Dallin, Soviet Russia's Foreign Policy, 1939-1942 (New Haven, Yale 1942), 105-111; Ernest Jackh, The Rising Crescent (New York, 1944), 228 ff.

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of the Balkan Entente at Belgrade, in February 1940, the Turkish Foreign Minister suggested that the members of the Balkan Entente act together in regional solidarity under any threat of aggression, although it was generally admitted that there was little prospect of success of any such action. 15/ Until the German attack of Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, the Turkish Government continued to urge concerted Balkan action.

Nevertheless, on February 17, 1941, Turkey signed an agreement with Bulgaria, referring to the "inviolable peace and sincere and perpetual friendship of the two countries," and indicated that "Turkey and Bulgaria considered as the immutable foundation of their foreign policy to abstain from aggression." There was no reference to the possibility of German occupation of Bulgaria-- which occurred in March--for an attack on Greece. Toward the end of February, the British Foreign Minister, Mr. Eden, tried to reconstitute a Balkan pact, composed of Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey, but failed because of Yugoslav and Turkish reluctance, although Turkey had warned that it would not be indifferent "to foreign activities that might occur in her security zone." Turkey felt unable to move when Yugoslavia and Greece were attacked by Germany in April 1941, and by the late spring of 1941, Crete and many of the Aegean islands in the neighborhood of the Dardanelles and the Turkish coast of Asia Minor were in German hands. Shortly thereafter came the German attack, on June 22, 1941, on the Soviet Union. By the Summer of 1941 the Balkan region was entirely under German control.

Turkey remained a nonbelligerent ally of Great Britain, but did not venture to break off relations with Germany until August 2, 1944. Meanwhile the Turkish Government, partly in the interest of its position as guardian of the Straits and of securing the approaches to those waters, continued to express its desire for the constitution of some kind of Balkan Union within the framework of a general world security organization. 16/

Although

15/ See L'Entente Balkanique du 9 février 1939 au 8 février 1940 (Bucharest, 1940), 109 pp.

16/ The London Times, October 14, 1943; New York Times, October 15, 1943. See also T-356 [R-61]. The Greek-Yugoslav Project for Balkan Union. On August 18, 1944

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Although the unity of the Balkan Entente was broken under German and Italian pressure in 1940-1941, and none of the members seemed to live up to its obligations, the Turkish Government has recently looked with favor on a revival of Balkan unity, in which it would again play an active rôle. Turkey would probably be opposed to a Balkan union of which it would not be a member, as it apparently considers participation in such a union an essential element in its own security. It is not unlikely that such a union, with Turkey as a member, might contribute constructively to a solution of the problem of the Straits, provided it sought no exclusive control of the area. Turkish circles are said to believe that the achievement of a general world organization for the maintenance of peace would not render unnecessary a Balkan union, although it would relieve such a union of apprehensions concerning the security of its members and would make superfluous common military precautions, except those arising from their limited obligations under a regional union.

On the other hand, in the event of the formation of a South Slav Union, to which Yugoslavia and Bulgaria would belong to the exclusion of other states of the Balkan region, it is probable that Greece and Turkey might form an alliance, or even closer union. Despite difficulties during the present war, Greek-Turkish friendship has been so well founded that it has stood the strain, and Turkey has voiced no objection to the Greek desire to acquire the Dodecanese Islands. Although commercial relations between the two countries were very limited during the inter-war period, Greece has a primary interest in the problem of the Straits in view of the Greek carrying trade which goes through those waters. Greek and Turkish statesmen have both expressed their hopes of close collaboration in the future, in view of their common interests as Balkan and Mediterranean Powers. Turkish leaders apparently believe that Turkish-Greek friendship will greatly facilitate achievement of plans which allegedly being formulated by Great Britain and the Soviet Union, and especially the plan for a South Slav union as suggested by the Yugoslav Committee of National Liberation, so that the northern

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16/ Con't. It was announced that the Bulgarian Government had officially advised the Turkish Government through its minister to Ankara, Mr. Nicholas Balabanoff, that Bulgaria would do its utmost to oppose any German military action against Turkey through an Axis Balkan satellite. See New York Times, August 19, 1944.

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and southern Balkan countries would not be rivals but form a Balkan union with the assistance of both Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Otherwise, it would seem likely that a Greek-Turkish alliance, with the possible addition of Albania, under the auspices of Great Britain might become a make-weight in a Balkan and Near Eastern balance of power.

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