

CONFIDENTIAL
Confidential

T-517
January 24, 1945

1-7-1-1
39

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE PROBLEM OF THE TURKISH STRAITS

I. BRITISH STRATEGIC INTERESTS

Since the opening of the Nineteenth Century, especially, Great Britain has had a significant strategic interest in the problem of the Straits--as well as in the Suez route to India. Great Britain's strategic interests have been largely imperial in character and have been concerned with the preservation of a stable political situation along the routes to India. ^{1/} As long as the Ottoman Empire seemed to serve such a purpose, the British attempted to preserve its territorial integrity, and a similar situation obtains in present-day Anglo-Turkish relations.

The Republic of Turkey, like the former Ottoman Empire, occupies a key position in the Mediterranean, which is of peculiar interest to Great Britain. Turkey is the guardian of the Straits and holds, therefore, the keys to the Black Sea. A large section of the Baghdad Railway, which is on the overland route to India, lies in Anatolia. Turkey is also an important state in the Mediterranean, important to the British position in Palestine, Egypt, and the Suez Canal. In addition to the port of Izmir (Smyrna), Turkey now has an excellent harbor at Alexandretta, and Mersin has been reconstructed.

II. BRITISH ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN THE STRAITS

British economic and commercial interests have been equally significant, since, for decades, British shipping exceeded that of any other power in the use of the Straits. British shipping predominated in the

Straits

^{1/} See especially Halford L. Hoskins, British Routes to India (New York, 1928); Vaughn Cornish, Great Capitals: an Historical Geography (London and New York, 1923).

VITAL STORAGE

-2-

Straits following the last World War until 1927. Italian tonnage exceeded that of Great Britain for the first time in 1927, a condition which prevailed until 1936, when the British once more took the lead until 1939. In general, British tonnage in the Straits has exceeded 2,500,000 tons annually, although in 1930 it was more than 3,600,000 tons, ^{2/} The following is an indication of British commercial use of the Turkish Straits:

(Registered Net Tons)

	1913	1924	1926	1932	1937	1938	1940
Ships		972	848		1,195	1,235	282
Tonnage	5,370,781	1,984,783	2,915,053	2,647,770	2,601,497	2,890,184	693,040
Percentage of Total	37.5	25.9	20.7	15.1	20.0	26.8	21.7

Great Britain had been an important trader with and an important investor in the old Ottoman Empire, and it remained a significant importer of Turkish goods and a supplier of materials to the Turkish Republic. ^{3/} Nevertheless, British Trade with Turkey fell well below that of Turco-German commerce in the inter-war period. While Germany, for example, took about fifty percent of Turkish exports and supplied about fifty percent of Turkish imports, Great Britain supplied only 3.4 percent of Turkish imports and received only 11.2 percent of Turkish exports. British trade with Turkey was substantially equal to that of Italy or the United States. The first clearing agreement between the United Kingdom and the Turkish Republic was signed in 1935. Until recently Turkey tended to purchase more from Great Britain than it sold, and British exports to Turkey immediately prior to the

war

^{2/} For tables see T-515. The Problem of the Straits.

^{3/} See especially P. B. Dertilis, Le problème de la dette publique des États balkaniques (Paris, 1936), ch. VI.

CONFIDENTIAL

-3-

war were under the credits scheme, outside of clearing. Toward the close of 1938, for instance, arrears reached £ 1,700,000. In June 1938 Great Britain made a loan of £ 6,000,000 for armaments, while the Germans extended a credit of 150,000,000 RM.

It is significant, too, that in its program of industrialization, the Turkish Government entrusted Great Britain with most of the work related especially to military and naval security, such as the coalworks of Zonguldak, the iron and steel works of Karabuk, the power stations, harbor and port installations, the naval base at Geleuk, the deep-water piers opposite the island of Cyprus, the harbors at Mersin and Alexandretta, and the shipbuilding works for the Turkish merchant marine. 4/

III. BRITISH POLICY CONCERNING THE STRAITS

A. Backgrounds of British Policy

So far as Great Britain is concerned, the campaign of Napoleon in Egypt (1798-99) may be said to have opened the modern phase of the Eastern Question, although Russia had reached the Black Sea permanently in 1774 and by the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji had won the right for its commercial ships to pass through the Straits. Similar rights were extended to the commercial vessels of other powers, but the Straits were closed to warships according to the "ancient rule" of the Ottoman Empire, which Great Britain agreed to respect in the Treaty of the Dardanelles of 1809.

The Nineteenth Century witnessed a struggle over the problem of the Straits, in which the primary contestants were Imperial Russia and Great Britain. Though other elements and other nations were involved, 5/

the

4/ See Ernest Jackh, The Rising Crescent (New York, Farrar and Rinehart, 1944), 241-42. Warships were also ordered from British shipyards in 1939 and a contract for the Dardanelles fortifications was awarded to a British firm and British engineers served as advisers.

5/ For the American position see T-390. The United States and the Question of the Turkish Straits. 9 pp.

CONFIDENTIAL

-4-

the history of successive conventions may, perhaps, be summed up in the Anglo-Russian rivalry. Russia desired that the passage of the Straits be open to its warships and closed to others, while Great Britain desired that the Straits be closed to warships and opened only to commercial vessels. If the Straits were opened to warships, the British desired that British ships have access to the Black Sea. The Russians, on the other hand, would have made the Black Sea a Russian lake safe from the menace of the British fleet. Russia, for a brief period, by the secret provisions of the Treaty of Unkiar Eskelessi in 1833, received the right of its war vessels to pass through the Straits, which were to remain closed to the war vessels of other powers. That position, however, had to be given up, because of the pressure of Great Britain, in the conventions of 1840 and 1841, which once more closed the Straits to foreign vessels of war. The legal rule of closure remained a part of the public law of Europe from that time until 1914 despite the vicissitudes of international politics and intervening wars. The Treaty of Paris (1856), following the Crimean War, did not change the rule, though it demilitarized the Black Sea. Neither the Convention of London (1871), nor the Treaty of Berlin (1878), made essential changes in this respect, though the penetration of Germany into the Ottoman Empire before 1914 altered the political situation fundamentally. 6/

From the beginning to the end of the Nineteenth Century, Great Britain remained a firm supporter of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and opposed Russia in the question of the Straits. With Germany playing a basic economic and political rôle in the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain ceased to hold to the policy of supporting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire as a

necessary

6/ In general see Turkey No. 16 (1878). Treaties and Other Documents Relating to the Black Sea, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, 1535-1878. (Translations). Cmd. 1953. See also V. J. Puryear, England, Russia, and the Straits Question, 1844-1856 (Berkeley, University of California, 1931).

CONFIDENTIAL

-5-

necessary position and sought to gain advantages in case of a partition. ^{7/} Moreover, partly in view of a possible German threat in the Eastern Mediterranean after the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the British position with respect to the passage of Russian warships through the Straits began to change. On February 11, 1903 the Committee of Imperial Defense went on record "that the exclusion of Russia from the Straits was not for Great Britain a primary naval or military interest." The Director of Naval Intelligence reported:

It may be stated generally that a Russian occupation of the Dardanelles, or an arrangement for enabling Russia to freely use the waterway between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, such as her dominating influence can extract from Turkey at her pleasure, would not make any marked difference in our strategic dispositions as compared with present conditions.

Although conceded in principle at this early date, it was hoped that a concession to Russia in the matter of the Straits need not be made, and if made, only for other concessions on the part of Russia. Britain

did not

^{7/} See Howard, Partition of Turkey, 47 ff.

^{8/} See the decision of the Committee on Imperial Defense regarding the Straits, February 11, 1903. Memorandum by Sir Charles Hardinge. Memorandum respecting the passage of Russian warships through the Dardanelles. Foreign Office, November 15, 1906; British Documents on the Origins of the War, IV, 59-60. Sir James Headlam-Morley, Studies in Diplomatic History (New York, King, 1930), Historical Adviser to the Foreign Office, notes, however, that "the answer is very carefully restricted and only deals with the naval position as it was in the very unusual collocation of the time, and naturally does not imply that the opening of the Straits would not have serious strategical importance in the future. So far as it goes, however, this clearly gave freedom to the political handling of the question." [242]. Headlam-Morley also declared that there was "little analogy between the Suez Canal and the Straits", because the Straits gave access to Constantinople, whereas the Suez Canal was "far removed from all the vital parts of Egypt"!

CONFIDENTIAL

-6-

did not have to make any concession in the matter of Straits to Russia either in 1907 on the occasion of the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of August 30, 1907 or during the period of the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-1909 because of the relative weakness of Russia following the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905. Nor did Great Britain come to the support of Russia in the problem of Turkey and the Straits on the eve of the World War of 1914-1918, when that problem was raised in acute form with the sending of the Liman von Sanders military mission to Turkey by Germany.

During the World War of 1914-1918, however, Great Britain was forced to accede to the Russian demands with respect to Constantinople and the Straits, although it was not until after the British campaign in the region of the Dardanelles had begun that Russia made a definite and formal request. On March 12, 1915, Great Britain acknowledged the Russian claim to Constantinople and the Straits, in return for which Russia was to respect British and French commercial rights in these waters, and Great Britain was to have the neutral zone in Persia on the basis of the 1907 agreement. France gave its reluctant consent to the Russian demands on April 10, 1915. 9/

B. British Policy in the Inter-War Period

The end of the World War brought about an entirely new status to the Straits. The Russian Revolution of 1917 forced Russia out of the war and forced its surrender of the rights to Constantinople and the Straits according to the secret treaties of 1915-1917. The Armistice of Mudros (1918) gave Great Britain a controlling influence

over

9/ H. N. Howard, The Partition of Turkey, Ch. IV. The agreement with respect to Constantinople and the Straits laid the ground for the treaties partitioning the Ottoman Empire in the period of 1915-1917, in which Great Britain took a leading rôle, obtaining Mesopotamia (Iraq) and later on, Palestine, both of which were ultimately assigned to Great Britain as mandates.

CONFIDENTIAL

-7-

over the destinies of the late Ottoman territories, including the Straits, and the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) was to seal British dominance. 10/ The Sèvres Treaty not only partitioned the Ottoman Empire and subjected the Turkish portions to drastic controls, but set up a rigid "international" control over the Straits. Though theoretically Constantinople remained Turkish, the Straits were "to be open, both in peace and war to every vessel of commerce or of war and to military and commercial aircraft, without distinction as to flag." But the Treaty of Sèvres, because of the revolt of the Turks under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and the successful war against the Greeks between 1919 and 1922, proved abortive. Under Atatürk's leadership a national government was established at Ankara, which in its National Pact of April 23, 1920, declared that the security of Constantinople being guaranteed, freedom of the Straits for commerce would be assured.

The Conference of Lausanne (1922-1923) 11/ ended the Greco-Turkish struggle, recognized the complete independence of Turkey, and provided a new Convention of the Straits. At the very beginning of the discussion of the problem of the Straits, Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Minister, described his conception of the permanent factors in the problem of the Straits: 12/

1. The

- 10/ Treaty Series No. 11 (1920). Treaty of Peace with Turkey. Signed at Sèvres, August 10, 1920. Cmd. 964.
- 11/ Turkey No. 1 (1923). Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922-1923. Cmd. 1814. Ministère des affaires étrangères. République française. Documents diplomatiques. Conférence de Lausanne sur les affaires du Proche-Orient (1922-1923), Recueil des actes de la conférence. Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1923. Première série, Tomes I-IV; Deuxième série, Tomes I-II.
- 12/ Cmd. 1814, p. 141-42.

CONFIDENTIAL

-8-

1. The primary interest in these waters, from the point of view both of economic life and security against attack, of the littoral States of the Black Sea, both great and small, and the necessity of giving equal consideration to the interest of all those States.
2. The character of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora and the Bosphorus, as an international highway for the commerce of the world between two international seas, and the necessity, therefore, of treating it, as far as possible, in the same manner as other international waterways, whether, rivers, straits or canals, with a view to assure the freedom of peaceful commerce.
3. The existence of the capital of Turkey and the seat of the Caliphate on the shores of this waterway.

Three theses with respect to the Straits were presented at Lausanne, and there was no real intention on the part of Lord Curzon to treat the Straits like other international waterways, such as, for example, the Suez Canal. The old struggle between Russia and Great Britain was now resumed with the Soviet Government playing the rôle of the Tsarist regime. The British thesis concerning the Straits, intended to preserve the "freedom" of the Straits, under a kind of international control, would actually give a position of dominance to the British fleet. The Turkish project, preserving Turkish sovereignty, gave a restricted freedom in the Straits. The Soviet plan, also preserved Turkish sovereignty but closed the Straits to warships, with the Black Sea remaining virtually a Russian mare clausum.

In the end, the Convention of Lausanne guaranteed, essentially, commercial freedom of the Straits, with certain restrictions in war time. War vessels, which any one Power, in time of peace, might send through the Straits, were not to exceed the strength of the most powerful Black Sea fleet--the Soviet. However, the

Powers

CONFIDENTIAL

-9-

Powers reserved the right at all times and under all circumstances to send not more than three warships into the Black Sea, none to exceed 10,000 tons each. Hostile acts in the Straits were forbidden, but even if Turkey were at war, neutral vessels were allowed freedom of passage. The zone of the Straits was demilitarized, though there were certain exceptions, Constantinople, for instance, being allowed a garrison of 12,000, a naval base and an arsenal. To enforce these provisions an International Commission of the Straits, under the League of Nations and composed of one representative each of Turkey (President), France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Rumania and the Soviet Union, was established. While Turkey had desired an individual and collective guarantee if the Straits were demilitarized, the Powers refused. Instead they merely offered, in case the security of the Straits were menaced, to get together by all the means which the Council of the League of Nations might suggest. Turkish security was not guaranteed. Moreover, the Russians looked upon the Straits provisions as a possible threat to the shores of the Black Sea.

The Turkish Government accepted the Lausanne Convention, and, although it desired revision, the question was not pressed until the meeting of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. On May 23, 1933, Tefik Rüstü Aras, the Turkish Foreign Minister, after analyzing the problem, and after private discussions with Sir John Simon, the British Foreign Minister, proposed that "a Committee should be set up consisting of all the riparian States of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and of the United States of America and Japan." He, therefore, submitted the following resolution: 13/

The General Commission decides to set up a special committee, composed of representatives of Mediterranean and Black Sea riparian States, together with representatives of the United States of America
and Japan

13/ League of Nations. Records of the Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments. Series B. Minutes of the General Commission. II. December 14, 1932--June 29, 1933. IX. Disarmament. 1933. IX. 10. pp. 486-87.

CONFIDENTIAL

and Japan, to consider the situation of the Straits [Dardanelles and Bosphorus] as put forward by the Turkish delegation.

The British delegation, however, thought that consideration of this problem should be deferred, although it appeared to be not unsympathetic with the Turkish position.

When Italy began its march into Ethiopia in 1935, Turkey, considering itself threatened at least by implication, followed by the British lead in applying economic sanctions against Italy and in support of the League of Nations. In the fall of 1935 Turkey, along with Greece and Yugoslavia, in answer to a British request to place their ports at the disposal of a Great Power acting under the authority of the League of Nations, replied that it would "fulfil the obligations under the Covenant." 14/ Subsequently Turkey asked the British Government to furnish it with reciprocal assurances, "which were duly convened."

Perhaps the Turkish Government felt that Great Britain's attitude toward revision of the Straits régime would be altered in Turkey's favor. On April 10, 1936 Turkey made a formal request for revision of the Lausanne Convention, with a genuine possibility of success. 15/ There were indications that the Turkish Government, in the interest of its own security, was prepared to act alone, in case its request did not receive favorable consideration. Both the British and Soviet Governments hastened to accede to the calling of a conference to consider the problem of revision.

The conference met at Montreux, Switzerland, on June 22, 1936 and lasted until July 20. 16/ All the Lausanne signatories were represented except Italy,

which

14/ 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. Cmd. 3072.

15/ Stephen Heald and J.W. Wheeler-Bennett, Documents on International Affairs (London, Oxford, 1937), 645-48.

16/ Actes de la Conférence de Montreux concernant le régime des Detroits. 22 juin--20 juillet 1936. Compte-rendu des séances plénières et procès-verbal des débats du comité technique (Liège, Belgium, 1936), 310 pp.

CONFIDENTIAL

-11-

which refused to send a delegation as long as sanctions prevailed and Great Britain kept its mutual assistance agreements in the eastern Mediterranean. It was understood from the beginning that there would be a new convention, that commercial freedom would be guaranteed, and that Turkey would have the right to remilitarize the Straits; but there was fundamental disagreement, particularly between Great Britain and the continental Powers, concerning the Turkish right to close the Straits. When the conference began, Tevfik Rüstü Aras, the Turkish Foreign Minister, presented a draft which abolished the Commission of the Straits and placed the zone definitely under complete Turkish sovereignty, with the right of closure. The project guaranteed freedom of commerce, but remilitarized the Straits. Non-riverain Powers were limited to 14,000 tons of warships in the Straits and 28,000 tons in the Black Sea. Submarines and civil and military aircraft were completely excluded from the Straits. The other Powers challenged the Turkish project though they agreed that a change was necessary. The Soviet Union attacked those features limiting the right of Soviet warships to pass to and from the Mediterranean, and insisted on a privileged position for the Black Sea Powers. The British counter-project, presented on July 6, raised the tonnage limitations in the Straits and in the Black Sea and provided that in case of war belligerents could pursue their enemies through the Straits into the Black Sea--an obvious threat both to Turkey and the Soviet Union. The British project also provided that the Turkish right to close the Straits was to be decided by a two-thirds vote of the Council of the League of Nations. It also provided for an International Commission of the Straits. Naturally the British draft aroused the opposition of the Turkish and Russian delegations, as well as the members of the Balkan Entente. The Soviet delegation was so incensed that it was prepared to leave the conference. Rumania, now in close alliance with Turkey in the Balkan Entente, had revised its Straits policy and came out strongly against Great Britain. M. Titulescu, the Rumanian Foreign Minister, accused the British delegation of duplicity--of supporting collective security and regional pacts at Geneva and then sabotaging them at Montreux.

In the

CONFIDENTIAL

-12-

In the end a compromise was effected between the British position and those of Turkey and the Soviet Union, and a new Convention was drafted by July 20, 1936. 17/ In general, the Montreux Convention affirmed commercial freedom of the Straits in time of peace and war, even if Turkey were a belligerent, provided the commercial vessels committed no hostile acts. In war, belligerents were forbidden to use the Straits, except when acting under the League of Nations, or under the terms of a regional pact to which Turkey was a signatory and which was registered under the Covenant of the League of Nations. If Turkey considered itself threatened by imminent danger of war, it had a right to close the Straits, subject to a two-thirds vote of the Council of the League of Nations. Naval vessels of the Black Sea states--primarily the Soviet Union--were subject to some restriction, but non-riverain states were limited to a maximum of 45,000 tons of light vessels.

The new Convention was a distinct victory for Turkey, for the members of the Balkan Entente and for the Soviet Union. But it also added further complication to Turkey's foreign policy. Since 1921 Turkey and the Soviet Union had worked in close political association. Great Britain, reluctant though it had been in its final approval of the Turkish position at Montreux, now became one of the mainstays of Turkish security, and within three years entered into an alliance with Turkey.

C. Great Britain, Turkey, the Straits and the War

The Montreux Convention remained in formal operation in the years following 1936, but as the war clouds gathered, Turkey continued to move, however cautiously, in the orbit of Great Britain and France. Following the destruction of Czechoslovakia by Germany in March 1939 and the subsequent British guarantee to Poland, the British Government offered to support Greece and Rumania (April 13, 1939), and communicated this declaration to Turkey. On June 23, 1939, Turkey signed a declaration

of

17/ Turkey No. 1 (1936). Convention regarding the Regime of the Straits with Correspondence relating thereto. Montreux, July 20, 1936. Cmd. 5245 Also T-515. The Montreux Convention of the Straits, L (1936).

CONFIDENTIAL

-13-

of mutual assistance with Great Britain and France which ultimately developed into the treaty of October 1939.

There is no doubt that the Turkish Government was somewhat alarmed at the seeming shift in the position of the Soviet Union in the signing of the so-called non-aggression pact with Germany on August 23, 1939 as well as at the aggressive and expansionist attitude shown in the direction of the Baltic States. When the Soviet Government suggested "the conclusion of a bilateral pact of mutual assistance limited to the regions of the Black Sea and the Straits" to Turkey in the fall of 1939, the Turkish Government turned down the project, and immediately thereafter concluded the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Treaty of Mutual Assistance of October 19, 1939. 18/ This pact pledged Turkey to "collaborate effectively with France and the United Kingdom" and to "lend them all aid and assistance in its power." This would seem to have implied use of the Straits, though Protocol No. 2 declared specifically that Turkey's obligations could not compel Turkey to engage in armed conflict with the Soviet Union.

Throughout the war, Turkey, despite some wavering, partly on account of the ebb and flow of the war on Turkish national interests, has remained a non-belligerent ally of Great Britain. Turkey's primary concern was the maintenance of its territorial integrity, independence, and the opportunity to build up a new country free from outside interference or economic domination. On Italy's entry into the war on June 10, 1940, Great Britain and France asked Turkey to implement the Treaty of Mutual Assistance of 1939, but on June 26, Dr. Saydam, the Prime Minister, announced in the Grand National Assembly the decision not to take any such action, which might involve Turkey in possible hostilities with the Soviet Union (Protocol 2). The Turkish Government was of necessity reassessing the political and military situation following the defeat of France in the summer of 1940. It was believed in Ankara that the Soviet Union desired joint control of the Straits with Turkey and possibly

one or

18/ Turkey No. 2 (1939). Treaty of Mutual Assistance between His Majesty in respect to the United Kingdom, the President of the French Republic and the President of the Turkish Republic. Angora, October 19, 1939. Cmd. 6123.

CONFIDENTIAL

-14-

one or more bases in the vicinity. Announcement of the conclusion at Berlin on September 27, 1940 of the German-Italian-Japanese alliance was received with some relief in Turkey, partly because it was felt that the pact would prepare the ground for an improvement of Soviet-Turkish relations and even of Anglo-Soviet relations, possibly with Turkey serving as an intermediary.

Turkish fears of Soviet designs on the Straits were renewed, following the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler, June 22, 1941, four days after the Turco-German non-aggression pact of June 18, 1941. The Germans alleged that Great Britain had agreed to Soviet ambitions in the region of the Straits. On August 10, 1941, however, Great Britain joined with the Soviet Union in declaring that 19/

in view of anti-Russian propaganda by the Germans, His Majesty's Government and the Soviet Government have considered it right to reaffirm categorically their attitude towards Turkey in order that the Turkish Government may be under no delusion in the formation of their own policies towards Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

So far as Great Britain was concerned, the declaration was "intended to be a simple reiteration" of the engagements involved in the Anglo-Turkish alliance of October 19, 1939. Like the Soviet Union, Great Britain affirmed that it had "no aggressive intentions or claims whatever with regard to the Straits" and declared that it was prepared "scrupulously to observe the territorial integrity of the Turkish Republic".

As a result of the decisions taken at the Casablanca meeting between Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt, on January 14, 1943, some apprehension existed in Turkey lest the war might extend to regions close to Turkey, whereby Germany would exert pressure on Turkey, either to establish a defensive line which might include the Straits or to permit passage of troops under the pretext of meeting an Allied offensive through Turkish territory.

Mr. Churchill

19/ Goodrich-Jones-Myres, Documents on American Foreign relations, 1941-1942, V, 686-87.

CONFIDENTIAL

-15-

Mr. Churchill, therefore, telegraphed President İnönü on January 26, expressing a desire to meet him, with the primary object of going further into the question of strengthening Turkey's position through the supply of equipment. Prime Minister Churchill, at the conclusion of the meeting at Adana, January 30, 1943, declared it was the wish of Great Britain to see Turkey's "territories, rights and interests effectively preserved", and its particular desire to have "warm and friendly relations established between Turkey and our great Russian ally to the northwards to whom we are bound by a twenty-year Anglo-Russian treaty." 20/

Notwithstanding pressure on Turkey to grant bases and to stop shipments of vital raw materials, particularly chrome, to Germany, the Republic of Turkey, without concrete assurances from the Allies and without possession of the promised war material, continued to stress its policy of neutrality, with preservation of its alliance with Great Britain.

In such a policy the Allies found much to criticize. Early in June 1944, Great Britain officially protested against the use of the Straits by German warships which had been employed in the Black Sea. 21/ When Mr. Eden announced in the House of Commons on June 14, that Great Britain was profoundly disturbed by the fact that the Turkish Government, by allowing German vessels to pass through the Straits from the Black Sea into the Aegean, had helped to increase German naval strength in that region, Numan Menemencioglu, the Turkish

Foreign

20/ For text III United Nations Review 3 (March 15, 1943), 106-110. Address to the House of Commons, February 11, 1943. Present at the meeting were President İnönü, Premier Saracoglu, Foreign Minister Menemencioglu, and Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, among others.

21/ New York Times, June 6, 1944

CONFIDENTIAL

-16-

Foreign Minister, who was directly responsible for the policy, was forced to resign. 22/

The resignation of Numan Menemencioglu accelerated the development of Turkish policy toward a break with Germany, which took place on August 2, 1944. 23/ Although the Soviet Government was distinctly reserved in its attitude toward the Turkish break with Germany, Prime Minister Churchill announced the break in relations with Germany, with apparent satisfaction in his address to the House of Commons on August 2. 24/ This act, in

Mr. Churchill's

22/ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons. Official Report. Volume 400, No. 90. Wednesday, 14th June, 1944, cols. 1986-88. The vessels which were passing through the Straits were of two types. The first were known as K. T. vessels, of about 800 tons, with a normal armament of two 3.7 inch guns and machine guns. The second were E. M. S. craft, of about 40 or 50 tons, with a normal armament of one three pounder, machine guns and depth charges. The former could be used for transport of troops and supplies, the latter for various purposes, including submarine chasing. To obtain passage, the Germans dismantled their armament, which was reinstalled on reaching the Aegean Sea. Mr. Eden said: "Both classes of vessel must...be regarded as either men-of-war or auxiliary vessels of war, the passage of which by a belligerent through the Straits in time of war is prohibited under Article 19 of the Montreux Convention."

23/ New York Times, August 3, 6, 1944.

24/ For text see New York Times, August 3, 1944. The United States welcomed "as a step toward full cooperation with the United Nations in their struggle against Nazi aggression today's decision of the Turkish Grand National Assembly to sever diplomatic and economic relations with Germany". For the Soviet comment see Pravda, August 7, 1944.

CONFIDENTIAL

-17-

Mr. Churchill's opinion, had infused "new life into the alliance we made with Turkey before the war," and if Turkey were attacked by Germany or Bulgaria, Britain would make common cause with Turkey. Mr. Churchill also hoped that the Turkish break with Germany would "contribute to the continuity of friendship of Turkey and Russia".

In the months following the break in diplomatic and economic relations between Turkey and Germany, the United States and Great Britain opened negotiations with the Turkish Government concerning the right of merchant ships to pass through the Straits into the Black Sea carrying supplies for the Soviet Union, in accordance with the terms of the Montreux Convention. The United States Government took the position that since the Montreux Convention provided for passage of merchant vessels under any flag and with any cargo, there was little question as to the right of merchant vessels to pass through the Straits, and no special agreement would be necessary even though they carried a defensive armament. 25/ even though they carried assurance of the right of passage and the sending of supplies via the Straits would serve as an element in the rehabilitation of Turkish political relationships with the Soviet Union, in particular, and with the United Nations as a whole. 26/ By the middle of January 1945 it was publicly announced that supplies to the Soviet Union were passing through the Turkish Straits. 27/

IV. SUMMARY

British strategic and economic interests in the Turkish Straits have been of great significance since the period of Napoleon. Throughout the Nineteenth Century Great Britain was engaged in a secular struggle with Imperial Russia over the problem of the Ottoman Empire and the regime of the Straits. While Imperial

Russian

25/ See T-537. Passage of Merchant Vessels Through the Turkish Straits. See Press Release No. 6, January 10, 1945.

26/ It should also be noted that the break in diplomatic relations between Turkey and Japan might serve a similar purpose.

27/ See New York Herald-Tribune, January 10, 13, 1945.

CONFIDENTIAL

-18-

Russian policy centered about the problem of attaining freedom of passage for commerce through the Straits and of assuring the security of Russia from hostile attack by foreign fleets passing through the Straits into the Black Sea. Great Britain sought to preserve commercial freedom and at the same time to bar the Russian fleet from access to the Straits, unless other fleets had equal access through the Straits to the Black Sea. Although the British Government came to the conclusion in 1903 that passage of a Russian fleet through the Straits into the Mediterranean would not affect the strategic disposition of the British Mediterranean fleet, the British Government did not have to concede to the Russian ambition until March 1915. The Soviet Government renounced the agreements whereby Russia had obtained control over Constantinople and the Straits, and in the postwar years Britain and the Soviet Government, in slightly different form, resumed the ancient struggle over Turkey and the Straits. Great Britain was able to assert its principles in the abortive Sèvres Convention of 1920, and in the Convention of Lausanne of 1923 both of which preserved commercial freedom in the Straits and both of which theoretically enabled Great Britain to dominate the Straits. Great Britain reluctantly accepted the Convention of Montreux (1936), which preserved commercial freedom, but established a basic Turkish control over the Straits. However, while during the early years of the inter-war period Turkey and the Soviet Union were in close understanding, following the Montreux Convention, Turkey and Great Britain drew more closely together, and in 1939 entered into an alliance. Great Britain appears satisfied with the Montreux Convention, and together with the Soviet Union, guaranteed to respect it, in August 1941. Although British interests in the Straits are probably somewhat less than they were in the Nineteenth and the early part of the Twentieth Century, mutual interests still bind Turkey and Great Britain, and it is probable that Great Britain will continue to be satisfied with the régime of the Straits established at Montreux.

Prepared by:
TS: HNHoward

Reviewed by:
TS: PWireland
GLJones, Jr.

CONFIDENTIAL