



## THE STRAITS QUESTION ACCORDING TO BRITISH DOCUMENTS (1774-1953)

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### Introduction

The problem of the Straits began in the 18th century with the arrival of Russia at the coast of the Black Sea, which had been a Turkish lake for some three centuries. The Turks were astride the Straits, in possession of the capital of the former Byzantine Empire, whose heir Russia considered itself to be, and they barred Russia's way to the Mediterranean. Russian aspirations naturally fell on the warm water port of Constantinople, and Russian policy developed the aims of

- (a) ensuring free passage for all Russian vessels, whether merchantmen or warships,
- (b) excluding the warships of all other countries, and
- (c) securing a foothold on the Straits to guarantee (a) and (b).<sup>1</sup>

The other power chiefly concerned was Britain, who considered Russia a menace to her eastern communications and for a long time resolutely opposed the emergence of Russian warships from the Black Sea and supported Turkey for this purpose. British policy had evolved to such a point that in October 1944 Churchill was able to tell Marshal Stalin that in principle he favoured both Russian warships and merchantmen having free access to the Mediterranean. But Russian policy, as will be seen, had consistently pursued the aims mentioned above until 1953.<sup>2</sup>

### 1774-1841

The first breach in the Turks' exclusive control of the Straits was made by the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Kutchuk Kainarji (Küçük Kaynarca) of 1774, which granted free passage to Russian merchantmen. The same privilege was gradually acquired by other powers and in 1829 it was extended by the Treaty of Adrianople to all powers with whom the Ottoman Empire was not at war. The principle of the freedom of the Straits, at least to merchant vessels in peace time, was thus established.<sup>3</sup>

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1 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

2 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

3 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

On three occasions' (in 1798, 1805 and, particularly, 1833) Russia came very near to attaining its objectives. Nelson's victory at Aboukir prompted the Sultan to make an alliance with Russia in 1798 against Napoleon which, for the duration of the war, gave Russian warships the right of wintering and effecting repairs in Turkish ports, and an implied right of passage. Britain adhered to this treaty. In 1805 a fresh Russo-Turkish treaty confirmed Russian warships' rights of wintering and repair, explicitly stated their right of passage and furthermore closed the Straits to all warships except those of Russia and Turkey. Russia thus seemed to have gained all it wanted, except a guarantee of its permanence.<sup>4</sup>

The Sultan soon repudiated this arrangement. In 1807 a British fleet forced the Dardanelles, made an ineffective demonstration off Constantinople and only repassed the Straits with loss. By their ensuing alliance of 1809, Britain and Turkey mutually recognised "the ancient rule of the Ottoman Empire" whereby the Straits were closed in peace-time to the warships of all powers. Under the guise of this "ancient rule" Britain in fact introduced a new principle of great importance, namely, that the Sultan could no longer open the Straits at will, except at the risk of forfeiting British recognition of his right to close them.<sup>5</sup>

In 1833, Turkey was once again brought face to face with Russia by an external threat. Russia, deeply concerned to prevent the occupation of Constantinople by the victorious and vigorous Mehmet Ali, was the only power willing and able to intervene on behalf of Turkey. Hence, a strong Russian naval and military force arrived at Constantinople, and Russian officers proceeded to strengthen the defences of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and to train the Turkish army. Russian influence at Constantinople reached its peak and was marked by the Russo-Turkish defensive alliance of Hunkiar Eskelessi (*Hünkar İskelesi*) in 1833, which in effect put Turkey under the military protection of Russia, opened the Straits to Russian warships and bound Turkey to close them to all others as its contribution, to joint defence. Russia seemed at last to have obtained that military control of the Straits which would have effectually fulfilled its desires.<sup>6</sup>

#### 1841-1914

Britain was alarmed, but it was not till 1841 that Palmerston was able to bring about the Treaty of London, under which the Sultan promised to maintain, and Britain, Austria, France, Prussia and Russia engaged to respect, the "ancient rule". Not only was further Russian predominance on the Straits thus prevented, but the ancient rule acquired international recognition. Subsequently the rule was reaffirmed on three occasions when Russia had brought it into question: after the Crimean War, by Turkey and the Concert of Europe in the Treaty of Paris (1856); after Russia had tried to repudiate it during the Franco-Prussian war, by the same Powers in the Treaty of London of 1871; and after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, by British and Russian declarations at the Congress of Berlin. Thus sanctioned, the "ancient rule" remained in force till 1914, when its violation by the *Goeben* and *Breslau* precipitated the entry of Turkey into the Great War.<sup>7</sup>

In the interval between 1841 and 1914 Britain began to come round to the opinion that it would be more advantageous for the Straits to be open, rather than barred, to all warships. While its naval preponderance and occupation of Cyprus and Egypt left Britain little to fear from Russian attack in the eastern Mediterranean, it was gravely handicapped in the latter part of the 19th century by being unable to deploy in the Black Sea as a counter to Russian pressure in Central Asia. However, by 1903, official British opinion was prepared

4 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

5 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

6 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

7 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

for Russian warships to be admitted to the Mediterranean, even though British and all other warships might remain shutting out of the Black Sea. Russia became increasingly dissatisfied with the situation. At the beginning of the century it found itself unable to send its Black Sea fleet against the Japanese in 1905; unable to send it to the Aegean to meet the Austro-Hungarian threat to Salonica in 1908; unable to prevent the Turks from closing the Straits to all shipping during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-12; and unable to stop the German *Drangnach Osten*<sup>8</sup> which intersected the Straits with the Baghdad Railway and put them under the potential control of the German military mission in Turkey. Taking advantage of improved Anglo-Russian relations, Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Isvolsky pursued the matter to some purpose with Sir E. Grey in 1908, and Charikov, the Russian Ambassador to the Porte, raised it tentatively in 1911, much to the alarm of the Young Turks. With the possibility of a dismantling of the Ottoman Empire in mind, Russia was more than ever determined to forestall the occupation of Constantinople by any third power.<sup>9</sup>

### 1914-1923

Matters were brought to a head by the Allied attack on the Dardanelles in 1915, and under the secret arrangement of that year Britain and France agreed that Russia should annex Constantinople and the whole European shore of the Straits up to the Enos-Midia line, the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus up to the River Sakarya and the Gulf of Izmit (but not the Asiatic shores of the Marmara and Dardanelles), and the Marmara Islands and Imbros and Tenedos. As Sir E. Grey informed Russian foreign Minister, S. D. Sazonov, Russia was asking for the richest prize of the whole war and Britain could not give a greater proof of friendship. It was a complete reversal of traditional British policy, and he believed and hoped that a lasting friendship would be assured as soon as the proposed settlement was realised. However the settlement, which would have meant the realisation of the ambitions cherished by Russia both then and after the Second World War, was brought to nothing not only by the military resistance of the Turks under German leadership, but also, by the Bolshevik Government's rejection of all Tsarist treaties.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with President Wilson's twelfth point, the Treaty of Sevres (1920) which was drafted without reference to either Turkey or Russia, had(would it come into force) have demilitarised the Straits, put them under international control, and made them free to the warships and merchantmen of all nations, not excluding belligerents.<sup>11</sup>

The treaty made between Bolshevik Russia and Kemalist Turkey in 1921, when both were thrown together by antagonism to the Western Powers, tried to reintroduce a principle, excluded since 1841 but propounded again in the Soviet note of 8th August, 1946. Namely, that drawing up a regime for the Straits was the concern of the Black Sea Powers alone. This principle was also embodied in two treaties concluded by Turkey shortly afterwards with Soviet satellites, specifically, the Caucasian Republics and the Ukraine. Before effect could be given to the provision, however, Turkey entered into negotiations with the Allies (the United States being represented by observers) at Lausanne, and Russia took part in them.<sup>12</sup>

8 *Drangnach Osten* (German for "yearning for the East", "thrust toward the East", "push eastward", "drive toward the East" or "desire to push East") was a term coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to designate German expansion into Slavic lands. Literally "pressure towards the east". The former German policy of eastward expansion, especially that espoused under Nazi rule.

9 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

10 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

11 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

12 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

On 23 September 1922, a telegram was sent to the Ankara government, inviting them to send without delay a representative with full power to Venice, to negotiate and conclude final the treaty of peace between Turkey, Greece and the Allied Powers. If the Ankara government did not to send its armies during negotiations into neutral zones, the allies would support Turkey's demand for recovery of Eastern Thrace, and for admission to League of Nations. In order to fix definitely neutral zones, suggested a meeting immediately take place between Ankara government and allied generals at Mudania or at Ismid.<sup>13</sup>

On September 29, the Ankara government accepted the allied invitation, and therefore the conference between the Allied generals and Ismet Pasha commenced at Mudania on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, which had for its main object to obtain the cessation of hostilities between Nationalist Turkey and Greece and to fix a line in Eastern Thrace behind which the Greek army was to be invited to retire, the control of the Straits was also discussed. Apart from France and Italy, Britain was more concern about the "neutral zones" of the Straits<sup>14</sup>

However, on the third day a deadlock was reached owing mainly to the demand of the Turks that Eastern Thrace should be restored to Turkey in full sovereignty previous to the entry into force of the peace treaty. Therefore the allied generals returned to Istanbul in order to obtain instructions from their governments through the respective High Commissions.<sup>15</sup>

On October 10, Horace Rumbold, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, had a meeting with General Harington and Admiral Brock, during the course of which they agreed upon the measures which would have to be taken if the Turks refused to sign the protocol. At that meeting, General Harington strongly believed that, militarily, further delay was impossible. He also said that the Kemalists encroachments, particularly in the neutral zone of Ismid, were endangering the safety of his troops and could no longer be tolerated. In spite of verbal and written promises, he said, the Kemalists patrols continued to advance and were getting round his advance posts and the Bosphorus. It was accordingly decided that, in the event of his failing to obtain definite guarantees in respect of neutral zones, General Harington would present Ismet Pasha with a written ultimatum to the effect that if the Turks did not withdraw from those zones within thirty-six hours all necessary measures would be taken to expel them forcibly. Simultaneously with the presentation of this ultimatum, Admiral Brock was to publish a proclamation for clearing the Bosphorus within twenty-four hours of all native craft, which was to be concentrated in the Golden Horn.<sup>16</sup>

On the same day, Horace Rumbold had a meeting with the French and the Italian High Commissioners in Istanbul. At the meeting he said that he could not accept the responsibility for agreeing to anything which might prolong the discussions at Mudania and thereby put the safety of British troops in danger. He also said that the last Paris agreement<sup>17</sup>

13 FO371/7893/E9783/27/44, "Turkish peace conference", a telegram from Lord Hardinge (Paris), 23 September 1922.

14 FO371/7903/E11136/27/44, Telegram No: 882, From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 16 October 1922.

15 FO371/7903/E11136/27/44, Telegram No: 882, From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 16 October 1922. FO371/7905/E11498/27/44, Telegram No: 899. From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 17 October 1922. On October 6, General Harington sent a telegram to War Office stating that he shall endeavour to finish Mudania Conference at earliest possible moment whatever the Cabinet decision may be as Mudania was an atmosphere he disliked intensely. He anticipated great difficulty over securing agreement regarding neutral zone at Chanak but without being absolutely satisfied he shall not sign Thrace Convention. See FO371/7900/E10673/27/44, From General Harington to War Office, 6 October 1922.

16 FO371/7905/E11498/27/44, Telegram No: 899. From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 17 October 1922.

17 On October 6-7 in Paris, the British, French and Italian governments had agreed that they had to insist upon respect for the neutral zones. At the meeting, Lord Curzon said that Mustafa Kemal was adopting a very menacing attitude in regard to the Ismid zone. Poincaré interrupted to contend that the Turks were entitled to continue their concentration during the Mudania Conference, in as much as British reinforcements continued. Then Lord Curzon pointed out that the real

had specifically insisted upon respect for the neutral zones. For this reason, a clause in regard to them had been inserted in the convention, and was a matter of concern to all three governments. At the meeting, General Harington also described the impossibility of allowing the present military situation to be prolonged. He had, he said, to take important decision in a few hours' time, and he would like to know definitely whether he could count on French and Italian troops being sent to assist him in the defence of those neutral zones which the three Allied Ministers in Paris had insisted should be respected.<sup>18</sup>

General Pellé, the French High Commissioner, then stated that he had received a telegram from Paris in which Prime Minister Poincaré informed him that France would in no event go to war with Turkey, and said that he had made this clear to Mr. Curzon. The Italian High Commissioner, the Marquis Garroni, said that he must associate his government in this declaration of policy. Horace Rumbold thus announced that the British government must act alone, and General Harington and Admiral Brock explained to the meeting the measures which it was proposed to take if the Turkish reply respecting the neutral zones proved to be unsatisfactory. General Pellé and the Marquis Garroni did not protest, and were much relieved that the ground for a rupture, if one took place, should be based on the respect of the neutral zones in Asia, where no French or Italian troops would be affected and which would give their governments an opportunity of declining all responsibility.<sup>19</sup>

The Allied generals returned to Mudania after the conclusion of the meeting, and the convention in its final form was signed in the early morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> October, after a session which lasted almost without interruption for about twelve hours.

On the same day, General Harington sent a telegram to War Office, in which he stated that:

“We have reached agreement on every detail. I secured the 15 kilometre belt. I required from Boz Burnu to Kum Burnu and Straits are secured by an agreement that no artillery be allowed between Boz (Burnu) and Kara Bigha inclusive. I also secured line Shile-Darija. Troops to be immediately withdrawn. No new fortifications or reinforcements within 15 kilometres each side BozBurnu-KumBurnu line in Chanak area or within 40 kilometers each side Shile-Darija line. I got in the end all I wanted.”<sup>20</sup>

### 1923-1936

The Lausanne convention of 1923 did not fully satisfy Britain, Russia or Turkey. The freedom of the Straits, desired by Britain for both warships and merchantmen in times of war and peace alike, was adopted in principle. However, Bolshevik Russia was so weak in the Black Sea that she wanted the Straits closed to all warships including her own, and in the hope of meeting her susceptibilities the principle of freedom was qualified by the provision that no Power might send into the Black Sea a fleet stronger than the strongest Black Sea fleet. Nevertheless, the value of this provision was heavily discounted (a) by the possibility of two or more hostile fleets entering the Black Sea, and (b) by a stipulation that no State's rights of belligerency in the Black Sea should be prejudiced. Being then in the closest relations with Turkey, Russia wanted to set up Turkey as a barrier between itself and

contingency to be considered was that of Mustafa Kemal trying to cross the neutral zones. Poincaré declared that France would never make war. Lord Curzon answered that if Mustafa Kemal violated the Ismid zone, and if Great Britain were deserted by her Allies, the British government would withdraw from Ismid, and if necessary from Istanbul, and would wash their hands of the matter. The French and Italian governments must bear the entire responsibility. See FO371/7905/E11463/27/44, FO371/7906/E11538/27/44 and FO371/7906/E11539/27/44.

18 FO371/7905/E11498/27/44, Telegram No: 899. From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 17 October 1922.

19 FO371/7905/E11498/27/44, Telegram No: 899. From H. Rumbold to the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, 17 October 1922.

20 FO371/7903/E10953/27/44, From General Harington to War Office, 11 October 1922.

Britain. It was prepared to rely on Turkish custodianship of the Straits and demanded that Turkey should be allowed to fortify them. This was not insisted on by the Turks nor agreed to by the Allies, but Turkey received an Allied guarantee in case of an attack or threat against the Straits, and the International Commission which was to supervise navigation in the Straits was put under the presidency of a Turk. The net result displeased the Russians so much that they only signed the Convention after three weeks' delay and even then refused to ratify it.<sup>21</sup>

About 1930 Turkey began to turn again to Britain. As Anglo-Turkish relations gradually improved, so did Soviet-Turkish relations gradually deteriorate. Fearing, no doubt, an increase in British influence over the waterway, the Soviet Government reverted to the policy of Imperial Russia and sought an alliance with Turkey which would give Russia a military base on the Straits. Turkey refused, but the Soviet Government again pressed it to accept a military alliance when it re-opened the question of the Straits by its urgent demand for permission to re-fortify them in view of the Italian menace. The Turks once more declined to enter into a military alliance with the Soviet Union, and the resulting Montreux Convention of 1936 was again a compromise between the Russian desire to have free passage for Russian warships while excluding all others, and the British desire to prevent the Black Sea from becoming a *mare clausum*<sup>22</sup>. The principle of the freedom of the Straits was again enunciated but it was reduced by complicated restrictions even closer than those adopted at Lausanne. Belligerent warships were barred except in special cases. In peace time the entry and exit of the light warships of non-Black-Sea Powers was to be preceded by several days' notice to Turkey; the total tonnage of capital ships which non-Black Sea Powers might send into the Black Sea was also strictly limited; capital ships of Black Sea Powers might only pass through the Straits one by one. It was Turkey who won. It was authorised to fortify the Straits, to close them if it were a belligerent itself or even if it felt threatened, it obtained the abolition of the International Commission and she was left with considerable discretion in interpreting the new Convention. Britain, besides securing reasonable facilities for showing the flag in the Black Sea, saw political advantage in enabling the Turks, now more amenable to its influence, to hold the Straits. Soviet Russia, though far from content, did not refrain, as it had done in the case of the Lausanne Agreement, from signing and ratifying the Convention. Italy, who had refused to take part in the negotiations, did not adhere to it till 1938.<sup>23</sup>

### 1936-1953

The Soviet Union saw little reason to be satisfied with a settlement which hindered the passage of Russian warships, and, though it restricted much more severely the entry of those of non-Black-Sea Powers, nevertheless depended for its implementation on a custodian who was now armed and believed to be falling under British influence. When therefore in 1939 Turkey tried to bring its relations with Russia, which were still friendly, into harmony with her new alignment alongside Britain and France, the Soviet Government's immediate reaction was to demand a military base in the Straits or a share in their defence. In the event of failure, they insisted on a Turkish promise to exclude British and French warships or at least a Turco-Soviet agreement as to the interpretation of the relevant clauses of the Montreux Convention. Again the Turks refused to put themselves in the hands of the

21 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

22 *Mare clausum* (legal Latin meaning "closed sea") is a term used in international law to mention a sea, ocean or other navigable body of water under the jurisdiction of a state that is closed or not accessible to other states. *Mare clausum* is an exception to *mare liberum* (Latin for "free sea"), meaning a sea that is open to navigation to ships of all nations. See Robert McKenna, "The Dictionary of Nautical Literacy", McGraw-Hill Professional, 2003, p. 225.

23 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

Russians, and Turco-Soviet relations gradually deteriorated from that time onwards.<sup>24</sup>

In 1946, official Turco-Soviet relations underwent no marked change. The Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hasan Saka, who was in London in January 1946, was able to put the Turkish case to the Secretary of State, who, in turn, informed him of the apparently reassuring discussions he had had with Marshal Stalin in Moscow and assured him of British interest in the matter. In a second interview with the Secretary of State a month later, the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs enquired whether the British Government would consider adapting the Anglo-Turkish alliance to modern conditions. This suggestion was later embodied by the Turkish Ambassador in London in a memorandum which contained the alternative suggestion that the Secretary of State should re-affirm in the House of Commons the value which the British Government attached to the Turkish alliance. To these suggestions the Secretary of State replied that while the British Government attached great importance to the principle of the Anglo-Turkish alliance, the second alternative appeared to him preferable, inasmuch as he would wish to have further opportunity for observing the development of United Nations before undertaking discussions about the modification of the treaty, a reply which, with the Secretary of State's friendly references to Turkey in a speech in the House of Commons on the 21st February, fully satisfied the Turkish Government.<sup>25</sup>

In December 1945, by the publication in the press of articles on Armenian and Georgian claims to Turkey's eastern provinces and by a continual stream of hostile propaganda over the radio, the Soviet claims were kept constantly in view of the Turkish Government and people. This campaign drew indignant responses from the Turkish newspapers, resulting in a sustained press war between the two countries which in itself made difficult any improvement in their official relations. Anti-communist demonstrations organised by students also took place in Ankara, Iskenderun and elsewhere. These Turkish counter-attacks had drawn a protest from the Soviet Embassy in January 1946.<sup>26</sup>

Moscow also made use of Armenian irredentism against Turkey. During the winter of 1946, the Soviet Consul-General in Istanbul opened registration lists for Armenians wishing to return to Soviet Armenia. No obstacles were placed in the way of the candidates for emigration and the general feeling was that, although the Soviet action was somewhat provocative, Turkey would be better off without those elements in the Armenian minority who had sympathies with communism. The Soviet Consul-General claimed that as many as 8,000 Armenians had been registered, while Turkish sources put the number at no more than 1,400. Later in the summer, considerable resentment was caused by the news that the French Communist Party had organised a meeting demanding the cession of the three eastern provinces to Soviet Armenia and the creation of an independent Kurdistan.<sup>27</sup>

The Soviet occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan intensified the Turks' feeling of encirclement and the fear that a rising tide of aggression was flowing strongly alike round her eastern and western frontiers. They followed proceedings of the Security Council in New York with close, sceptical interest and, they began to be convinced that Soviet ambitions were too fundamental and obdurate to be checked by peaceful persuasion conviction which found open expression in the Turkish press.<sup>28</sup>

24 FO371/59231, R 17969/6/44, "The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles", 6 January 1947.

25 FO371/67305B, "Review of Events in Turkey-1946", by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

26 FO371/67305B, "Review of Events in Turkey-1946", by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

27 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

28 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

It became apparent in the early summer of 1946 that direct Soviet influence in Turkish internal affairs which had suffered a setback in the previous autumn, was becoming active once more. Two new periodicals, “*Gün*” and “*Gerçek*”, the contents of which followed the usual Communist directives, appeared and to some extent made complete the disappearance of “*Tan*” and “*La Turquie*”, which had been suppressed in the previous autumn. There were also signs that serious attempts were being made to infiltrate crypto-communist elements into the ranks of the Democratic Party, with the aim of either to splitting the Party or to controlling its leadership. Indeed, following the elections, it was discovered that the funds spent by Soviet sources on behalf of the Democrats in eastern Turkey had exceeded the propaganda expenses of the Republican Party, although there was no evidence to suggest that there had been any collusion between the Soviet agents and the Democratic leaders or indeed that the latter were even aware of the support they were receiving.<sup>29</sup>

The real purpose of the Soviet campaign was gradually becoming apparent. Although the Soviet Ambassador in Ankara had adopted the attitude that he could not, in view of the bad relations between the two countries, pay an official visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he had in the winter suggested to N. Sümer, the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, that the Soviet Government would be prepared to drop temporarily the question of territorial claims to reach an agreement over the Straits question. In June, S. Vinogradov, Soviet Ambassador to Turkey, went further and in conversation with the Prime Minister, Saraçoğlu, declared that a solution of the present deadlock was to be found in the rectification of the frontiers and the cession of a base to Russia in time of war. When, however, these claims were dismissed by Saraçoğlu, S. Vinogradov changed his approach and said that if Turkey would admit that the Straits were of greater importance to the Soviet Union than to any other country, and would agree to negotiate with Russia on that basis, there would be no more discussion of the three provinces or of a military base. The Prime Minister replied that the Soviet demands must be completely withdrawn before any answer could be given to such a proposal. Around the same time, suggestions similar to those of S. Vinogradov were also made to the Turks by the Yugoslav Ambassador and the Polish Chargé d’Affaires. The same technique had already been employed in the case of the Bulgarian Minister who, in the winter of 1946, had suggested that Turkish security was to be found in association with other Black Sea powers and added that one of the principal obstacles to a Turco-Soviet rapprochement was the continuance in office of the Prime Minister, Saraçoğlu, an impertinence which earned him an immediate rebuke. More surprising was a similar sounding by the Swedish Minister, who, however, repented and begged that his indiscretion should be forgotten.<sup>30</sup>

These conversations and the general tone of Soviet propaganda were in line with the view expressed privately by the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow while he was in Istanbul that summer that the real object of the Soviet offensive was to frighten the Turkish Government, which would emerge from the elections with excessive demands that could later be dropped in exchange for a close understanding. This would include the severance of the British alliance. Following this, Selim Sarper never returned to Moscow after this visit to Istanbul, but was appointed Minister to Rome. His replacement in Moscow was Faik Zihni Akdur, the then Turkish Minister to Sofia, who left for his new post in November.<sup>31</sup>

During the summer, interest in the Straits question quickened because according to the terms of the Montreux Convention, the Convention would automatically continue in force for a further five-year period unless a demand for a revision of these terms was made by

29 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

30 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

31 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.



any of the signatory powers before the 9th August. The question was therefore whether the Soviet Union would decide to demand such modification before the specified date; and on August 8th, the Soviet Chargé d’Affaires in Ankara handed in a note demanding modification of the Convention. After citing violations of the Convention alleged to have been permitted by Turkey during the war, the note proposed five changes:

the Straits to remain continually open to merchant shipping of all countries and to the passage of warships of the Black Sea Powers,

the passage of warships of other Powers to be forbidden except in cases specially provided for,

the Straits regime to be within the competence of Turkey and the other Black Sea Powers,

Turkey and the Soviet Union as the Powers most interested should by their common means ensure the defence of the Straits and prevent their utilisation by other states for purposes hostile to the Black Sea Powers.<sup>32</sup>

Under Article 29 of the Convention, this demand for revision should have been supported by one or two of the signatory Powers (according to the nature of the modification) and notified to all contracting parties. However the neglect of this procedure was not however used as an objection to the Soviet proposals.

The first three proposals were suggested to the Turkish Government by the United States Government in November 1945, and the controversy centred essentially round the fourth and fifth demands. The Turkish Prime Minister referred to the Soviet note in a declaration of policy on August 14th in which he said that Turkey was bound by international convention and would defend its sovereign rights, but was prepared to negotiate a revision of the Montreux Convention with its Allies and other interested states. He had modified his draft in accordance with suggestions made by the British Government. At the same time, the Soviet authorities intensified their nerve warfare in two ways. First by claiming to have discovered in the German archives reports from the former German Ambassador in Ankara about Saraçoğlu having suggested the dismemberment of Russia; and second by announcing that the British Military Authorities had a base at *Çanakkale* and Radar stations in Thrace and the Black Sea area operated by British personnel, that they controlled the aerodrome at Yeşilköy and had 5,000 advisers and instructors in the country. The Anatolian News Agency denied the first report and the Foreign Office denied the latter.<sup>33</sup>

The Soviet note, copies of which had been delivered to the British and the U.S. Governments also, was discussed by the two Secretaries of State in Paris. The British and American Ambassadors in Ankara gave the Turkish Government largely similar advice as their reply. Both Governments expressed to the Turks their own willingness to take part in a conference, and advised the Turkish Government to express their readiness to do likewise, but making it clear that this offer did not imply agreement with any specific Soviet proposals.<sup>34</sup>

In acknowledging the Soviet communication, the British Government pointed out that the agreement at Potsdam allowed for direct conversations between each of the three Governments and the Turkish Government; but had not, as the Soviet note stated, provided for negotiations. It was also underlined that the Soviet proposals did not mention the United Nations, with whose purposes and principles any modification of the Montreux Convention

32 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

33 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

34 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

was to be consistent. Finally, the British Government also emphasised that the international arena had long recognised that the Straits regime concerned other states besides the Black Sea Powers and Turkey, and moreover expressed the view that Turkey, as the territorial power concerned, should continue to be responsible for the defence and control of the Straits. The American reply also insisted on the concern of powers other than Black Sea with the Straits, and on the necessity of relating the Straits regime to the United Nations. It said that any aggression against the Straits would clearly be a matter for action by the Security Council. Both Governments stated their willingness to participate in any eventual conference.<sup>35</sup>

A 20 page Turkish reply was handed to the Soviet Chargé d’Affaires in Ankara on August 22nd. The first half was a detailed refinement of the Russian allegations of wartime violations of the Convention, maintaining that any technical violations that had taken place proved the necessity of updating the Annex to the Convention. They did not believe that the Convention itself needed to be revised or that Turkish control had been inadequate. However the reply accepted the first three Soviet proposals as a basis for discussion, but rejected the fourth and fifth. The fourth proposal disregarded the fact that the Convention was in force until at least 1956 and ignored the interests of the other signatory powers. The fifth was incompatible with Turkey’s inalienable rights of sovereignty and with the country’s security. The most secure guarantee for the Soviet Union would be the restoration of friendly relations with Turkey and recourse to the United Nations. The texts of the American and Turkish replies were published. That of the British Government’s reply, although communicated to the Turkish Government, was not published until November. Turkish opinion was much reassured by the Secretary of State’s statement of the British case in the House of Commons on October 23rd.<sup>36</sup>

Nerve-warfare continued in the form of rumours. One traced to the Soviet Consulate General in Istanbul, was that the Russians would attack Istanbul on September 13th or 18th, and that armoured troops had concentrated on the Bulgarian frontier. The Turkish Government took special precautions, a bomb was laid in the Bosphorus and the frontier garrisons were in a state of alert for nearly three weeks. On September 25th the Soviet Charge d’Affaires in Ankara handed in a second note. Although much of it consisted of arguments against the Turkish Government’s defence of their control of the Straits during the war, the note was more conciliatory and noted the Turkish Government’s acceptance of the first three proposals as a basis for discussion. The note contended that, since the Black Sea was an inland sea, the Straits were different from other waterways and the special position of Black Sea Powers had been recognised by treaties between Turkey and the Soviet Union in 1921 and with the Transcaucasian and Ukrainian Republics in 1922. It complained that the Turks had rejected the fifth proposal without knowing the concrete suggestions of the Soviet Government. The note also stated that if Turkey took military measures in the Straits in conjunction with Non-Black Sea Powers, such action would be inconsistent with the security of the Black Sea Powers. It concluded that the Soviet proposals were in accord with the United Nations and that a conference should be preceded by direct conversations between the Turkish Government and the Potsdam Powers.<sup>37</sup>

The Turkish Prime Minister’s initial reaction to the second note was a brief reply stating that there was no purpose in continuing the conversation as the Soviet point of view had been noted and fully discussed. The British Ambassador recommended that a categorical refusal to discuss specific proposals in any circumstances should be avoided and suggested

35 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir Kelly, 4 February 1947.

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a general line which the Turkish Government adopted. Both the British and the United States Governments restated their own views to the Soviet Government; the American note adding that Turkey should continue to be primarily responsible for the defence of the Straits, and that should there be an attack or threat of an attack, action should be taken by the Security Council.<sup>38</sup>

The Turkish reply which was given in accordance with the suggestions made by the British Government on October 18th stated that the recent exchanges of notes between the two Governments had made clear the respective points of view in accordance with the Potsdam Agreement. Moreover, it pointed out that the signatory state, desiring modification of the Convention, should now take the initiative foreseen by the Convention for summoning a conference, including the United States of America, for a revision. In addition, the Turkish note rejected in details both the Soviet charges of wartime violations of the Convention and the thesis that the Straits were the exclusive concern of the Black Sea Powers. It repeated that joint defence of the Straits would mean the derogation of Turkish sovereignty but that the Turkish Government would defend the Straits in the future as in the past, and declared that the Soviet note's reference to military measures in concert with non-Black Sea Powers was totally without basis. The claim that the Soviet proposals were compatible with the United Nations could not be reconciled with a proposal which ignored the existence of the United Nations and implied the violation of a neighbour's sovereignty.<sup>39</sup>

The Soviet Military Attaché informed the Turkish Director of Military Intelligence that the fifth Soviet proposal was in fact only a suggestion that the Turkish Government should undertake to reinforce their defences at any given point indicated by the Soviet Government. He was told that this proposal was unacceptable.<sup>40</sup>

On October 26, the British Ambassador in Moscow was informed in a note from the Soviet Government that the latter was not in agreement with the opinion of the British Government that direct conversations between the three Governments represented at Potsdam and the Turkish Government were completed, and that therefore they thought that a conference would be too early. On November 28th the British Ambassador in Moscow informed the Soviet Government in a brief written reply that, while taking their views into account, the British Government adhered to the opinion that there was no longer any purpose in continuing direct correspondence between each of the three Governments and the Turkish Government, and that any further discussion should take place at an international conference. The Turkish and American notes had remained without reply, but President **İnönü** took the opportunity of the reopening of Parliament on November 1st, where he stated that Turkey agreed that the Montreux Convention needed adaptation to modern conditions, and would welcome modifications consistent with the legitimate interests of the parties and its territorial integrity and sovereign rights.<sup>41</sup>

The interest shown by the United States in the Straits question encouraged both the Turkish Government and public opinion. It had already become customary in general policy statements by the President and Prime Minister to lay special stress on their desire for friendship with the United States immediately after the reference to the Alliance with Great Britain. As the Straits controversy developed, the fact was much noticed and complained of that, in addition to the officially shown interest of the United States Government, the American Press assigned much greater importance to the subject and to the texts of the

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respective notes than did the Press in the United Kingdom. The visits of the United States warships Missouri to Istanbul in April and Randolph, Fargo, Perry and Donner to Smyrna in November, were greeted with the greatest enthusiasm, and the United States statements on the latter occasion that the call was quite informal and without special significance were ignored and the maximum of public welcome and hospitality was offered. The growing United States interest in Turkey, primarily a reflex of the post-war post disillusionment about Soviet aims and activities generally, was stimulated by the favourable impression formed by visiting American journalists. They devoted themselves to creating in the minds of their numerous readers a picture of Turkey as the only neighbouring state that was standing up to Russia and as one which was setting an example in modernisation and real democratic experiment to all the countries of the Near and Middle East and South-eastern Europe. They owed this impression in no small degree to the facilities for meeting Turks, etc. arranged for them by the British Embassy, and the same favourable impression was formed by a number of visiting British journalists, so that Turkey seemed to have had a remarkably better press on both sides of the Atlantic during the year under review than might easily have been the case. This was particularly so in the United States where, as the U.S. Ambassador informed the British Ambassador, the typical association of ideas had been “Turkey-Armenia-atrocities.”<sup>42</sup>

The U.S. Ambassador, Edwin Wilson, who was the best type of American career diplomatist, received the British Ambassador privately on the day after the latter’s arrival and invited him to lunch before he had presented his credentials; and from the very first expressed his great interest in increasing by every possible means the support both moral and material of the United States for Turkey as the indispensable bulwark against Soviet expansion over the whole Near and Middle East. Mr. Byrnes showed his sympathy with this point of view in conversations with the leading members of the British Delegation in Paris, not only on the specific questions of the Straits, but also in regard to the possibility of helping the Turks in modernizing their defences.

In March 1947 the Truman declaration had a profound psychological effect in relieving the anxieties caused by the Soviet claims on the Straits and the eastern territories, by the Soviet machination in Azerbaijan, by the tightening hold on the Balkan satellites and the running sore in Greece with its threat of a Russian thrust to the Aegean. The fears which were loudly trumpeted by Moscow radio, that the United States Aid agreement, which was signed in Ankara on July 12, would transform Turkey into an American satellite. However the psychological effect of the American Aid programme and later of the Marshall offer<sup>43</sup>, and the re-assurances of British fidelity to the alliance had restored Turkish morale as regards direct aggression by the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

In 1948, Turkish interest in foreign affairs revolved around fear of Russia. Therefore all international events were instinctively judged in relation to the fear of Russian aggression. It was thus understandable that the Turks had continued, as in the previous year, to seek constantly for positive reassurances that they could rely on the Anglo-Turkish alliance of 1939. They informed both the British and the United States governments that they regarded the proposed Atlantic Pact as calculated to increase the danger of aggression against Turkey unless it were linked up with a Mediterranean Pact including Turkey.<sup>45</sup>

42 FO371/67305B, Review of Events in Turkey-1946, by Sir David Kelly, 4 February 1947.

43 Though the initial omission of Turkey from the list of recipients of Marshall Aid was rectified, the amount finally allocated caused great disappointment in Turkey. Marshall Aid to Turkey had been generous, though the Turks were inclined to complain that they did not receive as much as their value to Western Europe and the sacrifices they were making warrant.

44 FO371/72540/R840, “Annual Report for Turkey, 1947”, From Sir David Kelly to Attlee, 15 January 1948.

45 FO371/78661/R1033/1011/44, “Turkey: Annual Reviewfor 1948”, From Sir David Kelly to Bevin, 28 January 1949.

However the feeling of isolation and imminent danger had shaped Turkish foreign policy in 1949. There had been no change in Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union, but nobody had attempted to conceal the real state of hostility between the two countries, and the Turkish press had replied vigorously to propaganda from Moscow. It was only natural therefore that Turkey tried throughout the year to obtain some more solid assurances of Western support against possible Russian aggression. The country had made plain its desire to be included in the Atlantic Pact, or at least to be associated with it by some form of Mediterranean pact. Its exclusion from the NATO was therefore a severe disappointment, in spite of the assurances on Turkey's position which accompanied the signature of the pact. Turkish statesmen tried to pretend to their own people that the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Alliance (which the French had recently affirmed was still binding on them) and the Truman doctrine gave all the guarantees needed and that membership of the pact would merely have entailed inconvenient commitments. However, they adopted a different line in speaking to the representatives of the Western Powers. Their disappointment over the Atlantic Pact caused the Turks to welcome with all the more enthusiasm their admission the Council of Europe, even though they were somewhat aggrieved by the fact that they had not been invited to be a founder member. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that Turkey had at last been accepted as a European State and that the coping-stone had thus been set on Atatürk's policy of westernisation.<sup>46</sup>

In 1950 Turkey's relations with the Soviet Union did not change, and although an article in *Red Flead* in April, insisting once again on the need for revision of the Straits Convention, caused some anxiety, there was no renewal of direct Russian pressure.<sup>47</sup>

In 1951 the impending entry of Turkey into NATO and its support for the Middle East Command proposals produced a renewal of Soviet pressure, which had not been directly exerted since 1946. In November, the Turkish Government were informed that the Soviet Union regarded the adherence of Turkey to NATO and the construction of military bases on Turkish soil with American assistance as evidence of the design of the imperialist powers to make use of Turkey for aggressive purposes against the Soviet Union. This note was followed on the 24th November by one denouncing the proposed Middle East Command as aggressive in intention and stating that Turkey, together with the other founder members of the Command, would be responsible for the situation which might arise from its establishment. Strengthened by their increased feeling of security, the Turkish Government met these attacks with great firmness and confidence. Their reply to the first Russian note placed the responsibility for the present world situation on the Soviet Government themselves and affirmed that the military measures which Turkey was taking were designed entirely for self-defence. In their reply about the Middle East Command the Turkish Government were anxious to go further and to counter-attack by exposing Soviet machinations in Arab countries. However, although they did not believe that the tone of their reply would affect Soviet policy, the Turkish Government did not wish to appear provocative by diverging too far from the attitude of the other three governments (the British, the United States and the French governments). The reply eventually sent was therefore expressed more moderately, and on the 10th December the Foreign Minister Fuad Köprülü stated that Turkey did not intend to cede to other nations bases on Turkish territory and that only in the event of aggression would such bases be used in collaboration with Turkey's allies.<sup>48</sup>

46 FO371/87933/RK1011/1, "Turkey: Annual Review for 1949", From Sir Noel Charles to McNeil, 7 January 1950.

47 FO371/95267/RK1011/1, "Turkey: Annual Review for 1950", From Sir Noel Charles to Bevin, 13 January 1951.

48 FO371/101848/WK1011/1, "Turkey: Annual Review for 1951", by Knox Helm, 2 January 1952.

In 1952 Turkey's inclusion in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, its sponsorship of the Middle East Defence Organisation, and its efforts to promote Balkan defence did not go without the notice of its communist neighbours. Early in the year both Soviet Russia and Bulgaria protested against her subservience to the aggressive designs of Anglo-American imperialism; and during the following months Soviet policy towards Turkey was marked by sporadic outbursts of abusive propaganda.<sup>49</sup>

In 1953 Turkey came in for its share of the Soviet "peace offensive" following the death of Stalin. On the 31st of May, the Soviet Government sent a note informing the Turkish Government that it had no territorial claims on Turkey, as it now considered it possible "to ensure the security of the Soviet Union in the area of the Straits on conditions acceptable alike to the Soviet Union and to Turkey". In July, the Turkish Government sent an anodyne reply, expressing satisfaction at the renunciation of territorial claims and reminding the Soviet Government that the Straits question was regulated by the Montreux Convention. This was immediately followed by a second Soviet note protesting against the impending British and United States naval visits to Istanbul at that time. The Turks retorted that these visits were permitted under the Montreux Convention and that they were, therefore, none of Russia's business. A further Soviet note on the same subject was left unanswered. The Turkish Government was in no way impressed by these Russian manoeuvres. It was convinced that there had been no change of heart at Moscow; its only concern was that the apparently more conciliatory Soviet line might, by confusing Western opinion, undermine the resolution of the Western powers to build up their defences and open the way to negotiations which might involve concessions to Russia. Turkey remained firmly convinced that were due to the growth of Western strength (any modifications which may have existed in Soviet tactics), and that the moral to be drawn was that the Western powers should steadfastly pursue their policy of further strengthening their unity and power.<sup>50</sup>

49 FO371/107547/WK1011/1, "Annual Report on Turkey for 1952", From Knox Helm to Anthony Eden, 9 January 1953.

50 FO371/112921/WK1011/1, "Annual Report on Turkey for 1953", From Knox Helm to Antony Eden, 1 January 1954.

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