

FASCIST ITALY'S '*MARE NOSTRUM*' POLICY AND TURKEY

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In both the Western and Turkish historiography there has been a tendency to give short shrift to Turkish-Italian relations in the 1930s. Insufficient attention was paid to the subject and consequently the importance of the relations between Fascist Italy and Kemalist Turkey was somewhat downplayed. Several reasons may be at the roots of this lack of care. Historians, past and present, have rather had some difficulty in taking the Fascist Italy seriously. Since 1945 Italian fascism at times has acquired the semblance of near-innocence, an impression deriving in part from the contrast with the more vicious régime of the Third *Reich* and in part from the temptation to dismiss Benito Mussolini as mere buffoon. The newsreel image of Italians surrendering by their thousands during the military operations of the Second World War is dramatically imperfect; but the impression still remains and it inhibits efforts to reassess the historical significance of Fascist Italy.

Long years of extensive research have failed to reveal a single scholarly monograph, or even an article in periodical literature, on the theme of Fascist Italy's '*mare nostrum*' (our sea) policy and Turkey. Neither Turk nor Westerner has devoted more than a few pages to the matter under focus here. Moreover, much of what they have said about it is superficial and inadequate. This paper is an attempt to fill this void and it intends to make a contribution to a better understanding of an important but long neglected topic by trying to argue that there was, indeed, something more serious in Fascist Italy's '*mare nostrum*' policy than is generally acknowledged, something more than frivolous projects and idle rhetoric.

Italy was poor in raw materials and densely populated, a factor which was made more evident by the restriction of emigration and an extraordinary rise in the birth rate as a result of Fascist propaganda. The Italians began to feel uncomfortable within their frontiers. Fascism had made Italy into a military power, allowing the *Duce* to put his expansionist policy into practice. In

this, reasons of prestige for the Italian leader were certainly important, as was the failure to fulfil, according to Rome, the promises of territory made to it to persuade it to enter the war against its former allies. Mussolini was dreaming of capturing a colonial empire for his country¹.

The principle which underlay the '*mare nostrum*' policy of Mussolini could be called Machiavellian. The basis of that attitude was that in great times and in great issues it was impossible for statesmen to feel themselves bound by the ordinary canons of morality. Mussolini believed that he was living in those great days, and he in particular intended to recreate, so far as possible, the old structure of the Roman Empire and in the circumstances any method which secured that result was justifiable.

From 1932 it was known in the eastern Mediterranean that Italy was preparing for an imperialist adventure; only the point of attack was uncertain. Therefore from this date onwards relations between Ankara and Rome had gradually deteriorated. Turkish - Italian trade had not developed according to expectations. The agreement of the limits of territorial waters around the island of Castelrosso in 1932 had remained an isolated instance of mutual trust².

From 1934 Turkey was beginning to follow a more active foreign policy. There is little doubt that this resulted from a quickening appreciation of external threats and the most immediate menace was Italy. It was no coincidence that the active phase in Turkish policy began at the same time as the Italians started to appear menacing. Italy became the principal factor in Turkey's foreign policy and the government began to try to diversify its diplomatic relations. It was primarily against Italy that Turkey concluded its alliance with Greece and began to play a prominent part in the League of Nations and led its southeastern European neighbours in the formation of the Balkan Pact. It was also with the Italian threat in mind that Turkey and Greece began to increase the size of their fleets after 1934. Italy's intensive preparation for war with Ethiopia created a tense and alarming atmosphere

¹ E.M.Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire Builder*, London, 1977, p.69. See also M. MacCarthy, *Italy's Foreign Policy and Colonial Policy 1914-1937*, London, 1938, p.211.

² Cevat Açıkalın, "Turkey's International Relations", *International Affairs*, XXIII, No.4, 1947, p.478.

in Turkey. The Italian threat and the British opposition to a regional Mediterranean Pact enhanced the feeling of insecurity in Ankara³.

Local symbol of the Italian threat was the Dodecanese Islands which Italy began to fortify in 1934 contrary to agreement. Italy reinforced its garrisons in the Dodecanese and turned these islands into a sort of rear base. So long as Italy spoke or thought in terms of its destiny in the Mediterranean, Turkey remembered that the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea belonged to Italy and that the heavy fortifications in the aero-naval base at Leros were aimed against naval communications to and from the Mediterranean. It was clear that the purpose of an air and sea base in the Dodecanese was either to attack western Anatolia or to disrupt sea traffic in the eastern Mediterranean. The use of these islands would depend to a large extent upon the naval balance in this part of the Mediterranean. The government of Rome also laid claim to other islands situated close to the Turkish mainland and made striking allusions to its special interests and plans in the East. Italy's excuses that the Leros fortifications were aimed at Russia were accepted with reservations. Turkey did not like the presence of Italian guns and airmen in the twelve islands of the Dodecanese, most of which lay within sight of its shore. The potential threat of Italy undoubtedly had been one of the factors responsible in placing the new steel complex at Karabük in northern Turkey, in locating the ammunition works, the aeroplane factories, the new railroad repair installations in the interior of Anatolia and in planning the railroad system⁴.

Mussolini followed remilitarization of the Dodecanese Islands with a series of inflammatory speeches indicating that Italy would not be denied much longer its 'historic objectives' in Africa and Asia⁵. After the most violent

³ Foreign Office Papers, Public Record Office, London – henceforth referred to as "F.O." – 371/19037/2849. Annual Report for 1934. Para.29. Also F.O.371/19040. Report of Captain Potts of 11 May 1935. Potts informed the Admiralty that Turkey and Greece had agreed to spend five million pounds on their fleets in 1935.

⁴ F.O. 371/1011/61. Loraine (Ankara) to Hoare, 25 November 1934.

⁵ Hugh Knatchbull-Hugesson, *Diplomat in Peace and War*, London, 1949, p.146. See also *Survey of International Affairs (1934)*, London, 1936, p.330n. Mussolini had begun to stake out the Italian claim anew in 1932 by propagandizing a series of articles which had appeared in the French press hinting that France would not be adverse to the settlement of Italian claims in Asia Minor. The Turkish government was seriously offended and protested vigorously to Rome. Documents Diplomatiques Français – henceforth referred to as "D.D.F." –, ser.1, vol.2, no.182 annexes.

of these speeches, Vasif Çınar, the Turkish ambassador in Rome lodged a formal protest with the Italian Foreign Ministry⁶. As one of Italy's 'historic objectives' was Antalya, a province on the Anatolian seaboard, Turkey had cause for concern. Mussolini's assurances to the Turkish ambassador in Rome that this passage of his speech did not refer to Turkey, since it was a European country, did not set the Turkish government at ease. The Turks had been unable to trust Mussolini⁷. This statement by the *Duce* showed that despite the Turkish -Italian Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality signed in 1928, Italy had not renounced its designs on Anatolia.

Atatürk and the Turkish leadership despised the Fascists as upstarts, too busy strutting about in fantastic uniforms to properly govern the nation at the head of which they had set themselves. Turkish opposition to Fascism, in many ways, derived as much from distaste as from calculation of national interest⁸. The Fascists appeared to the Turks as little better than civilian rabble-rousers who had militarized and brutalized a democratic nation. Atatürk, in comparison, had always insisted on a rigorous separation of army from politics and hoped to introduce democracy to his own country. The victorious commander, he had become the civilian President. Mussolini, a political agitator, had put on the uniform and airs of a generalissimo. In doing so, he earned Atatürk's contempt⁹.

⁶ Mussolini, 18 March 1934: "I could give you the details of a plan up to 1945 but I prefer to point out to you the historic objectives towards which our generation and the generations to follow should be directed during the present century. Let us calmly consider a plan that reaches the nearby millenium, the year 2000. It is only a question of sixty years. The historic objectives of Italy have two names: Africa and Asia. South and East are the cardinal points that should excite the interest and the will of Italians. There is little or nothing to do towards the North and the same towards the West, neither in Europe nor beyond the Ocean. These two objectives of ours are justified by geography and history. Of all the large Western Powers of Europe, Italy is nearest to Africa and Asia. A few hours by sea and much less by air are enough to link up Italy with Africa and Asia." Quoted from H. Braddick, "The Hoare-Laval Plan: A Study in International Politics", *European Diplomacy between Two Wars 1919-1939*, Chicago, 1972, p.153.

⁷ Falih Rıfkı Atay, *Çankaya*, vol.2, Istanbul, 1980, p.556.

⁸ Patrick Balfour Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, London, 1964, p.322. Also Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London, 1961, p.285.

⁹ "I am not", Atatürk assured Georges Bonnet in 1934, "like Mussolini who adores the uniform of a marshal or general and who covers himself with decoration; for all that he was never, like me, the commander of a victorious army." Georges Bonnet, *Vingt Ans de Vie Politique*, Paris, 1970, p.225.

The Turkish President dismissed Mussolini as a mere buffoon. He considered the *Duce* a caricature of a soldier, a wicked man parading in uniform who would sooner or later be unable to resist playing the role of a conquering Caesar and predicted that one day he would be hanged by his own people¹⁰. Accordingly, it had become difficult to credit the latter and his régime with the kind of disciplined energy that might have proved great enough to determine the issue of peace or war. That impression was further strengthened by the near-derision with which the Italian armed forces were often regarded. Certainly the *Duce's* legions had not evoked Turkish respect for their performance in battlefield. It therefore appears that Atatürk never took the *Duce's* flamboyant claims as seriously as some of his contemporaries in Western Europe, but the danger which Fascist Italy represented could not be ignored. Atatürk replied to Mussolini's speech by making a tour of Turkey's Mediterranean coast on a destroyer with a military torpedo boat escort. On another occasion, when Mussolini's ambassador mentioned Italy's claim to Antalya, Atatürk rose, excused himself, left the room and returned shortly thereafter in the uniform of a Turkish marshal. "Now please continue", he invited the startled ambassador. Later he was to react to Italian claims with even less tact. "Antalya is not in the pocket of your *Duce* in Italy", he scolded the Italian ambassador. "It is right here. Why don't you try to come and get it? I have a proposition to make to His Excellency and the *Duce*. We will allow him to land Italian soldiers in Antalya. When the landing is complete, we will have a battle and the side which wins will have Antalya." There was nothing for the frightened Carlo Galli, the lucid Italian diplomat of the pre-Fascist school, to do but ask if he was to understand that this was a declaration of war¹¹.

Despite the treaty of friendship and repeated assurances of Mussolini, the Turks did not feel wholly secure as to the effect of their country of Italian imperial ambitions, a feeling of which Italy was well aware. Turkey considered Italy and Mussolini its main foes.

If Ankara needed additional reasons to abhor Italian policy, Rome was not slow to provide them. The shift to a more aggressive Balkan policy after 1934 led Italy to adopt a much less accommodating attitude towards certain

¹⁰ H. Yücebaş, *Atatürk'ün nükteleri, fıkraları ve hatıraları* (Atatürk's witticism, stories and recollections), İstanbul, 1963, p.60.

¹¹ Kinross (1964), pp.322 and 545.

questions considered vital in the Turkish capital. In 1933, for example, Italy stood as god-father to the Turkish-Greek Treaty of Mutual Assistance. In 1934, however, Italian objections precluded the inclusion of Albania in the Balkan Pact and rumour was that Italy had also encouraged Bulgaria to keep out. In an Ankara extremely anxious that Balkan Union go forward, Italian obstruction could be viewed with nothing but distaste¹².

The year 1935 marked the start of a more dangerous phase in Italy's foreign policy. Mussolini began to cherish aspirations of dominating the Mediterranean and establishing a predominant position in the Near East. While it sought an empire in Ethiopia, Italy was also gradually and constantly building up its forces in Libya and the Dodecanese. The *Duce* understood that Turkey, defended by a war-hardened army and backed by that of the Soviet Union, was not for him and took another path.

The Italian–Ethiopian war, which began on 3 October 1935, placed Turkey in the forefront of the diplomatic stage. Once again, Turkish and Italian policies diverged and bilateral relations quickly began to sink into mutual enmity. Ankara quickly came to be one of the more outspoken leaders of the sanctions party in the League of Nations. Turkey took a prominent part in the sanctions imposed on Italy for its unjustifiable attack on Ethiopia and supported the proposal to impose oil sanctions. Tevfik Rüştü Aras, the Turkish Foreign Minister, attending the League in person at this time, was a vocal member of each of the committees created to consider the matter and throughout followed a line, originating with Atatürk himself, as radical as that of any member of the League. As late as the autumn 1935 Turkey was exporting coal, corn and cattle to Italy, but in November it accepted sanctions and the Istanbul port authorities refused to supply Italian ships with oil and coal. The Balkan Union, pursuing a united policy in harmony with the Little Entente (Yugoslavia and Roumania being members of both), attained for the time being a new level of importance. In December 1935 Turkey, with Poland, opposed the French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval's efforts to get the Hoare-Laval plan adopted by the League of Nations¹³.

¹² MacCarthy (1938), p.211.

¹³ Ahmet Şükrü Esmer, *Turkey and the United Nations*, New York, 1961, p.40.

At the end of 1935 Turkey had replied to the request of Britain for military support in the event of an Italian aggression, arising out of the application of Article 16 of the Covenant, on units of the Mediterranean fleet or other British objectives, to the effect that it would faithfully apply the Covenant in order to support, by collective action, the state exposed to such an act of aggression. Turkish reply constituted a complete and unconditional acceptance of the thesis of the British government. As regards certain specific naval facilities and means of support sought by London; the Turkish government stated that this matter was settled *a fortiori* by the above reply, but that as the question of facilities and methods of cooperation was a military one, Turkey was ready and anxious to discuss such matters with the British naval and military authorities. Arrangements were accordingly made early in February 1936 for discussions on naval, military and air matters to be conducted with the Turkish General Staff by, respectively, the naval and military attachés to British Embassy in Ankara and by an air officer specially delegated for the purpose by Royal Air Force Headquarters, Middle East. In the course of the discussions, full and frank information was volunteered by the Turkish General Staff, which was clearly eager to make the maximum contribution in its power towards cooperation in the event of war with Italy¹¹.

On 17 February 1936, shortly before the opening of these discussions, Carlo Galli, the Italian ambassador in Ankara informed the Turkish government orally that the Italian Embassy in London had learnt that one or several British Royal Air Force officers were to arrive, or had already arrived, in Turkey to visit aerodromes at Izmir and in southwestern Anatolia in order to prepare with the Turkish General Staff a collective action against the Dodecanese. Galli inquired whether this corresponded with the facts. In acquainting, Sir Percy Loraine, the British ambassador in Ankara with this *dé-marche*, Numan Menemencioglu, the Secretary-General of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed the desirability of acting in close understanding with the British government in the matter and handed to the British ambassador the text of the reply which it was proposed to return to Galli – to the effect that, since collective action had been decided on, the Turkish government did not think that any useful purpose would be served by reverting to the question of principle, of which Galli's request merely concerned a detail of application of interest to the military authorities only. The Turkish go-

¹¹ F.O. 371/20886/10426. Annual Report for 1936. Para.32.

vernment was, moreover, able to state formally that Italian information in regard to preparations for an attack on Italy was devoid of all foundation. After consulting the Foreign Office in London, Loraine was able to inform the Turkish government that, in the event of the British government also being approached by the Italian government, they would reply in terms similar to those of the Turkish draft, which appeared entirely adequate¹⁵.

Earlier, on 2 January 1936, Fethi Okyar, the Turkish ambassador in London was informed, in reply to an inquiry, that in the event of an unprovoked attack by Italy during the existing emergency on a nation, i.e. Turkey, fulfilling its obligations under the Covenant, Britain might be counted upon to do its duty. Similar assurances were given to the Greek and Yugoslav governments. 1936 thus started in an atmosphere of cordial cooperation between Turkey and Britain in the face of the difficult situation created by Italy in the Mediterranean. The policy of Turkey *vis-à-vis* Italy throughout the Ethiopian dispute was similarly inspired by a desire to cooperate in the greatest possible measure with Britain, consonantly with its obligations to keep in consultation with its Balkan allies¹⁶.

The Italian ambassador in Ankara, Carlo Galli, had inquired, at the very end of 1935 how the Turkish government intended to harmonize its conduct towards the British request for assurances with the spirit of the Turkish-Italian Pact of 1928, which was still in force. Turkey decided to consult Britain on the terms of the reply to be made to Galli, its purpose being to ensure that it should accurately reflect the identical conception held by both countries of the obligations imposed by the Covenant. On 3 January 1936 Loraine received from Menemencioğlu the text of an instruction which had been despatched to Okyar at London to this end. Loraine was able, on instruction from the Foreign Office, to convey to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs the view of the British government on the reply to be returned to Galli, which was to the effect that, in the event of an Italian act of aggression, Turkey immediately and automatically made common cause with its victim, and that the obligation to do so, which flowed from paragraph 3 of Article 16 of the Covenant, in no way conflicted with the Turkish-Italian Pact of 1928¹⁷.

¹⁵ Ibid. Para.36.

¹⁶ F.O. 371/954/28. Eden Minute, 7 January 1936.

¹⁷ Ibid.

In March 1936 Turkey, together with Greece, Yugoslavia and Roumania and in accordance with its obligations under the Covenant, supported the policy of oil sanctions, which the French Foreign Minister Pierre Etienne Flandin was endeavouring to prevent. Ankara was one of the most consistent supporters of the League. It was desirous of setting up international machinery to ensure the independence of every country¹⁸.

The loyal support given by Turkey in the application of economic and financial sanctions against Italy in connection with the Ethiopian dispute and the guarantees of mutual assistance exchanged between Turkey and Britain against the eventuality of an Italian act of aggression in the Mediterranean inevitably placed Turkish-Italian relations on an uncomfortable basis in the first half of 1936. On the Turkish side, there was genuine apprehension of Italian designs on southwestern Anatolia directed from the Dodecanese which no doubt sharpened Turkish eagerness to cooperate with London. On the other hand, the Italian ambassador in Ankara was the constant mouthpiece of his government's resentment at the policy pursued by Turkey regarding the Ethiopian dispute. At the end of February, for example, after complaining that Turkey was accentuating its cooperation with Britain and showing more zeal than other states in performing its role of collaboration, Galli reminded the Secretary-General of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the present crisis would pass, but that the memory of the clouds then obfuscating Turkish-Italian relations and, especially of Turkish-British cooperation, would keep green a certain resentment against Turkey in Italy. Menemencioglu replied that if such was the view that Italy was going to take, Turkey would just have to put up with it. In the course of the crisis Galli several times reverted, in conversation with the Turkish government, to his customary attitude of chiding a wayward Turkey and vaguely threatening that one day a day of reckoning might come¹⁹.

In the spring of 1936, however, the policy of sanctions and collective security broke down altogether, although as late as May 1936 the Turkish Foreign Minister professed belief in collective security, but added that the greatest vigilance was required for national defense. With the raising of sanctions and the ending of mutual and unilateral assurances of action in the event of Italian attack against a member of the League of Nations acting un-

¹⁸ F.O. 371/20886/10426. Annual Report for 1936. Para.134.

¹⁹ Ibid.

der Article 16 of the Covenant, Turkish-Italian relations became more normal, although suspicion of Rome's ultimate intentions continued to be present in the minds of Turkish statesmen. Turkey still remained hostile to any attempt of Italy to claim or establish any political or naval hegemony in the Mediterranean, or to try to reach with Great Powers only any form of Mediterranean settlement that left Turkey out of account or was of a character to strengthen the position of Italy or prejudice that of Turkey²⁰.

As indicated earlier, Turkey felt a long-standing suspicion of Italian intentions towards it. The Treaty of London of 26 April 1915, between the Entente Powers and Italy, had promised to grant the latter, "in the event of a total or partial partition of Turkey-in-Asia, a just share of the Mediterranean region adjacent to the province of Antalya." And the Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne Agreement of 17 April 1917 had clarified the Italian claims in Asia Minor, promising Italy the Aydın province with İzmir. Some of these territories had been partly occupied for a time by Italy after the First World War and they had been recognized as zones of Italian influence by the Treaty of Sèvres of 10 August 1920. Ever since this abortive treaty the Turks had been anxious about Italian designs on their land. Following his seizure of power in 1922 Mussolini looked around him, investigating the '*mare nostrum*' of the ancient Romans. He was seduced by the rich Anatolian land bordering the Mediterranean. The southwestern Anatolia, whose coasts could be easily seen from the Islands of Dodecanese attracted him. The Fascist leader went so far as to make, in 1925, secret concentrations of troops in some of the Dodecanese Islands with a view to effecting a sudden *coup de main* on the Mediterranean shores of Anatolia. The Turkish government, having being informed on time, was compelled to proceed with substantial mobilization. Fortunately, things went no further, but as Mussolini did not cease his ambitions each time he opened his mouth, Turkey, feeling the seriousness of the menaces, was obliged to live under strenuous vigilance²¹.

During Mussolini's decision to raise Italy's consciousness in 1926, Turks had heard words uttered in Rome on the Italian link with Anatolia. As part of this campaign, the *Duce* had embarked on a well-publicized trip to Libya. The trip had been significant because Mussolini was the first Italian Prime

²⁰ *Survey of International Affairs (1936)*, London, 1938, p.604. Also Ahmet Şükrü Esmer, "The Straits: Crux of World Politics", *Foreign Affairs*, January 1947, p.295.

²¹ Açıklam (1947), p.478.

Minister to personally visit one of Italy's African possessions while in office. The trip, of course, included venting Italy's colonial ambitions. Arnaldo Mussolini, for instance, the *Duce's* brother and a publicist declared that Italy had Tripoli, but that was only a beginning; there was the entire eastern Mediterranean basin, where the remnants of the old Ottoman Empire were to be found. There was Albania which had the oil that Italy needed. There was also Syria, which France would not even colonize because it had no excess population. Then there was İzmir which should belong to Italy. And finally there was Antalya. Such rhetoric understandably alarmed the Turkish government, which took seriously rumours that the Italian fleet was preparing to sail on Antalya²².

Meanwhile the over-population of Italy had given rise to the belief that France might be willing to transfer the Syrian mandate to Italy, if Italy were in return to forgo its claims in Tunisia. Italian government and its guided press had a keen interest in events in the mandated territory of Syria and were highly critical of French policy. Indeed Italy seemed for a time very eager to replace France as the mandatory in Syria. This possibility was extremely displeasing to Turkey. Should Italy, already in possession of the Dodecanese, succeed to the Syrian mandate, the government of Ankara apprehended that the Italians might take advantage of a future Russo-Turkish conflict to renew their claims to the Antalya littoral. While there was no immediate danger of such a possibility being realized, allowances had to be made for Turkish susceptibilities, since a nation which had suffered for the last hundred years under the continual hammer-blows of foreign intervention and occupation was bound to remain suspicious for a long time to come²³.

Turks had seen the Italian base in the Dodecanese Island of Leros steadily growing stronger. They had listened without conviction to the Italian contention that Leros exists against possible attack on Italy by either Russia or Britain. They had in short, been wont to regard Italy as their only potential enemy—for Turkey was at friendship, and bound by treaties, with all its neighbours.

²² *Oriente Moderno*, VI (June 1926), pp.327-329.

²³ Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris – henceforth referred to as "M.A.E." –, T 1939-1940, François - Poncet (Rome) to M.A.E., 14 July 1939, vol.628, pp.148-155. See also *Oriente Moderno*, XIX (August 1939), p.443.

For some time Turkey had shown dissatisfaction with the status of the Straits, demilitarized, opened to international navigation and placed under international supervision at Lausanne in 1923. The failure of the disarmament discussions and the consequent rearmament of Germany, together with shifting Balkan alignments, caused Turkey as well to consider a new programme of armament. The Ethiopian war had also had the effect of creating tension and uncertainty at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. It was, by April 1936, patently obvious that Italy would win the war in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian collapse underlined the failure of collective action as applied by League to provide security²⁴.

It was significant that while Turkey's reiterated wishes for a change in the status of the Straits had hitherto gone unanswered by the Western Powers, the Turkish note of 10 April 1936, led to prompt action. Turkey wanted a revision of the Straits régime established at Lausanne, because Article 18 of the Lausanne Straits Convention was no longer of any value under the existing conditions. By Article 18, the signatories jointly bound themselves to guarantee the demilitarized Straits. Obviously this had no validity in 1936 with Italy, a principal signatory, a declared aggressor. The Turks considered the matter most urgent. The Turkish case thus rested mainly on the changed circumstances and on the undependability of the guarantees undertaken in 1923. With Italy's exception, the reactions to the Turkish note were favourable²⁵.

On 16 May 1936, Atatürk, in a conversation with the British ambassador at Ankara Sir Percy Loraine, judged that the sanctions against Italy had obviously failed and there seemed little point in continuing them. He doubted, however, that Mussolini would be satisfied with the Ethiopian conquest. Mussolini had declared his goal to be the re-establishment of the Roman Empire and Atatürk was inclined to believe that he meant it. Any nation in the eastern Mediterranean could be the next target. The threatened nations should use the interim before the next attack, Atatürk thought, to strengthen and associate themselves in order to build up such an array of effective

²⁴ Feridun Cemal Erkin, *Les Relations Turco-Soviétiques et la Question des Détroits*, Ankara, 1968, pp.70-77. Esmer (1947), p.295. Also Harry Howard, "The Straits After the Montreux Convention", *Foreign Affairs*, October 1936, p.200.

²⁵ *Ibid.* For the text of the Turkish note see *Documents on International Affairs (1936)*, London, 1938, pp.645-648.

force and cohesion as to render further expansion a far too hazard venture for Italy to take. Germany also, Atatürk considered, was becoming a greater danger. Turkey's course was clear. It desired an alliance with Britain and France against the present Italian and future German threats. If Russia could be brought into this alliance so much the better²⁶.

A conference to consider a new Straits statute was held at Montreux, Switzerland, in June and July 1936. On 20 July, with Italy abstaining from the vote, the Montreux Convention brought back the Straits to full Turkish sovereignty and control. Turkey received the unrestricted right to occupy and fortify the Dardanelles and Bosphorus. It thus gained a heightened sense of international security in a period of growing distrust of collective security and non-aggression pacts. Ankara began serious armaments preparations. The details of these fortifications were not made public, but there could be little ground for doubt that no fleet would be likely to penetrate from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea against the will of the guardian of the Straits. The rearmament of the Straits restored Turkey to the position of a "power factor" in the Mediterranean²⁷.

For the first time since the beginning of the struggle for the Straits, Turkey, Britain and Russia were at one. This occurred largely through the opposition of all three states to Italian expansion, but it was only made possible by the real independence of Turkey. Turkey's free right to dispose of the Straits considerably extended its influence and significance. The Turkish government doubtless realized that by regaining almost complete control over the Straits, it would be so important in European diplomacy that not only could no country afford to disregard it, but each would have to seek Turkey's good will and friendship. That Turkish policy succeeded cannot be doubted²⁸.

On the other hand, what the Italians disliked in particular about the outcome of the Montreux Convention was the possibility of increased Russian influence to counter-balance their own in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the success of Britain in winning the friendship of Turkey which the Italians themselves had courted six years previously.

²⁶ F.O. 371/1011/63. Loraine (Ankara) to Eden, 16 May 1936.

²⁷ Text of Montreux Convention in League of Nations Treaty Series, No.4015, vol.173 (1936-1937), pp.213-241.

²⁸ Howard (1936), pp.201-202.

Turkey's position under the new convention was so strong, however, that it was in no hurry to obtain Italian adherence to it; it could always counter an Italian attempt to insist on the rights of Italian warships under the old convention by discriminating against Italian commerce passing through the Straits. Its firm attitude was made clear in a declaration uttered by the Turkish Prime Minister, İsmet İnönü, at the beginning of August 1936, to the effect that "those who have a policy of international peace at heart will have profit from collaboration with us. Those who expect a different policy from us will be disappointed"²⁹.

Italy seemed at this point to have realized the weakness of its position and therefore to have decided to reverse its policy of unfriendliness towards Turkey, in the hope, no doubt, of drawing it away from its new friendship with Britain. This was probably one of the chief motives underlying the assurances given by Italy to Turkey, Greece and Yugoslavia at the end of July 1936 as to its peaceful intentions in the eastern Mediterranean and its statement to Ankara that it continued itself bound by the Turkish-Italian Pact of 1928. These assurances were largely instrumental in enabling the British and Turkish governments to terminate the naval arrangements which had hitherto been a source of friction between Turkey and Italy. There followed an improvement in Turkish-Italian relations which was encouraged by the fact that Turkey was the first Power to remove its diplomatic representative from Addis Ababa, without waiting for a decision from Geneva, as a step towards the recognition of the Italian Empire in Ethiopia³⁰.

Relations between Turkey and Italy became correct on the surface; below the surface there were undercurrents showing that each side wished to obtain something from the other. Rome, in general way, aimed at undermining Turkey's loyalty to Anglo-French ideas concerning the Mediterranean; in particular it desired to secure Turkey's recognition of the Italian African Empire. Turkey, on its side, while resolute in resisting Italian blandishments, stood to gain by the adhesion of Italy to the Montreux Straits Convention. Aras received a message from Count Galeazzo Ciano in January 1937 to the

²⁹ *Survey of International Affairs (1936)*, London, 1938, pp.652-666. İnönü's speech in *İsmet İnönü'nün Söylev ve Demeçleri. TBMM ve CHP Kurultaylarında (1919-1946)*, (İsmet İnönü's Speech and Statements in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and in the Conventions of the People's Republican Party (1919-1946)), İstanbul, 1946, p.298.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

effect that he was considering sympathetically the possibility of Italy adhering – a move which was the outcome of a suggestion made to Count Ciano by the British ambassador in Rome. Later, a conversation between Aras and the Italian ambassador led to a suggestion that a meeting should take place between the former and Count Ciano for the purpose of carrying out the formalities of Italy's adhesion. The expectation that Italy was prepared to adhere formally at this stage was not fulfilled. However, Aras expressed his readiness to go to see Count Ciano in Italy³¹.

Meanwhile, the signature on 2 January 1937 of the Anglo-Italian gentlemen's agreement was greeted with satisfaction in Turkey. In a statement to the Republican People's Party Parliamentary Group, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, the acting Foreign Minister said that there was nothing to cause Turkey anxiety in this agreement, which, on the contrary, would result in the strengthening of security in the Mediterranean. Although Turkey had officially stated how pleased it was with the improvement of Anglo-Italian relations, it mistrusted and felt concern over Britain's endeavours to reach an agreement with Italy. Britain, on its part, was trying to detach Italy from Germany and perhaps win its good will or at least neutralize it. Following the Anglo-Italian gentlemen's agreement on the Mediterranean Ankara appeared to have feared that France and Britain might possibly at some future date permit Mussolini to occupy the port city of Alexandretta (İskenderun) in the mandated territory of Syria, just fifteen kilometers below the Turkish town of Payas in southern Anatolia, as part of an overall diplomatic bargain. In such a probable situation, Italy could further endanger Turkish naval security in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean.

At the end of January 1937 the Italian press made it known that direct conversations would shortly take place between the Foreign Ministers of the two governments to arrange for Italian adherence to the Montreux Convention. The event which, more than any other, paved the way for the Turkish-Italian conversations of 3 February 1937 was the signature on 2 January 1937 of the Anglo-Italian gentlemen's agreement concerning the Mediterranean, and that for two reasons. In the first place the reassurances which Italy gave in that agreement on the status quo in the Mediterranean implied a guarantee of the integrity and security of Turkey against attack by

³¹ F.O. 371/20886/10426. Annual Report for 1936. Para.86.

Italy in pursuit of 'its historic objectives'; in the second place the absence of in the agreement of any mention of arms limitation implied that Britain intended to rearm in order to ensure its position in the Mediterranean and this British rearmament seemed likely to contribute further to the security of Turkey as the friend of Britain³².

On the part of Rome, it was probable that, in addition to its desire to safeguard its rear during the Spanish affair, its ambitions in the Balkans played their part in inclining it to adopt a more friendly attitude towards Turkey. The influence of France in southeastern Europe had recently declined and that of Germany was steadily growing in its place. Italy was anxious to forestall this growth of German influence before it was too late and it was natural for it to begin, as in 1928, by securing the friendship of Turkey, the more so since the Turkish Foreign Minister was now President of the Permanent Council of the Balkan Entente. On the Turkish side, in addition to the obvious desire of Turkey to legalize the Montreux Convention by obtaining for it the endorsement of Italy as a signatory of the Lausanne Convention, there was always the hope that the coming conversations with Italy would be second – the Anglo-Italian agreement having been the first – towards the negotiation of a general Mediterranean agreement which it had long desired. Ankara did not wish to prolong the estrangement with Rome, which it held to be momentarily free from aggressive tendencies in the Mediterranean Sea for the simple reason that the latter was displaying considerable forces in Ethiopia at the time. Turkey therefore tried to restore the former relationship and gave clear proof of its conciliatory attitude to the Italian government by its de facto acknowledgement of the Italian Empire, to which Italy replied by its now friendly attitude in the Hatay question. It was hoped that Turkish-Italian relations would henceforth improve³³.

The nature of the conversations was made public in a press release issued from Milan on the evening of 3 February to the effect that a cordial meeting had taken place "in the spirit of the Turkish-Italian Pact of 1928"; that as a result of the discussion, which had not gone beyond a general sur-

³² *Survey of International Affairs (1936)*, London, 1938, pp.652-666 and *Documents of International Affairs (1936)*, London, 1938, p.87.

³³ *Ibid.* Also leading article of *Ulus*, 1 February 1937. The prominent French newspaper *Le Temps*, which was on foreign affairs at least, a semi-official organ, concluded on 2 February 1937 that Turkish-Italian reconciliation was under way. The paper also reminded that this friendship had obtained much too good results in Cilicia in 1921.

vey, it was found that no questions divided the two countries and only feelings of mutual confidence inspired their relations; that they had both decided to cooperate in the interests of Turkish-Italian relations and of a general policy of peace; and finally that they would continue to keep in touch through diplomatic channels in order to make their exchange of views effective in practice³⁴.

From this release and from subsequent press statements three things might have been inferred: in the first place that Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and Foreign Minister, repeated the assurances which he had already given to Turkey in July 1936 concerning the peaceful policy of Italy in the eastern Mediterranean and the essentially defensive nature of the fortifications of Leros³⁵. Secondly that the Italian Foreign Minister did not give his adherence outright to the Montreux Convention, but agreed to pursue the matter through diplomatic channels, in the hope of obtaining concessions in other spheres, such as special treatment for Italian experts and shipping, a settlement of outstanding questions regarding Italian property, schools and missions in Turkey and perhaps even a full recognition of the Italian Empire in Ethiopia. Finally that Count Ciano made an attempt, which caused some nervousness in France, to draw Turkey away from its attachment to Russia and Britain and attach it, instead, to the Rome-Berlin axis. But if this was his purpose, his failure to achieve it was clearly indicated by an announcement in the official Turkish press on 4 February 1937, that Turkey was "attached only to the bloc of peace and to no other bloc", as well as by Aras' attempt, which caused some surprise in diplomatic circles, to persuade Italy to return to Geneva³⁶.

As a result of the Milan conversation it was suggested that Count Ciano should visit Ankara in autumn and the Italian government sounded the Turkish government on the possibility of his signing a new treaty with Turkey on the occasion of that visit. In acquainting Loraine with this overture, Aras

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The fortifications of Leros had been explained by the Italian press as corresponding to the British fortifications of Malta and Gibraltar – i.e. as being for the purpose of protecting commerce. Since, if Italy were on bad terms with Turkey and the Straits were closed, the Italians would have no commerce to protect in that part, it was clear, according to the Italian press, that the fortifications of Leros presupposed good relations with Turkey.

³⁶ Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, London, 1948, pp.93-95. Editorial of *Ulus*, 4 February 1937.

said that the Turkish government contemplated sending a discouraging reply. It would be to the effect that, as Turkey attached particular importance to its relations with Britain, the moment seemed hardly opportune for widening the basis of Turkish-Italian relations; that on the basis of the existing Turkish-Italian Treaty (of 1928), which the Turkish government considered satisfactory, Turkey was always willing to cooperate in cultivating better neighbourly relations and that if in the future it seemed desirable to enlarge that basis, Turkey would not be willing to proceed to any bilateral arrangement since it could only contemplate arrangements which fell within the framework of the recent Anglo-Italian declaration concerning the Mediterranean. The communication which was eventually made by Ankara to Rome on these lines was transmitted by the Turkish Embassy in London to the Foreign Office³⁷.

As the date of Count Ciano's visit to Ankara approached, it became clear that the Italians were still determined that the occasion should not pass without obtaining some advantage for themselves. Aras informed the British Embassy in Ankara towards the end of October that he anticipated that the Italian government would insist on the introduction of the imperial quality of the King of Italy not only into the toasts which would be drunk at an official banquet during Count Ciano's visit, but also into the protocol which it was proposed to sign on that occasion recording the promise of the Italian government to accede to the Montreux Convention. Aras wished to know what the British government advised him to do in this quandary. As a result of the advice given to him, Aras, though evidently disappointed at seeing his hopes of Italian adhesion to the Montreux Convention failing to materialize, made up his mind that a postponement of the visit would not be unwelcome. In the event the visit was postponed to a later and unspecified date and Italy had not adhered to the convention by the end of 1937³⁸.

At the same time Rome began systematically cultivating Moslem good will. During a visit to Tripoli in March 1937, Mussolini grandiloquently proclaimed himself the 'protector of Islam'. Fascist emissaries in Libya made a special point of building new mosques and of allowing their Moslem subjects to attend Islamic primary schools and Islamic religious courts. The

³⁷ F.O. 371/954/28. Loraine (Ankara) to Eden, 24 February 1937.

³⁸ F.O. 371/20861 E5587/315/44. Eden to F.O., 22 September 1937. Also Cabinet Office Papers – henceforth referred to as "CAB" – 23/90. Cab 40(37), 3 November 1937.

Italians actively disseminated their propaganda through their Middle Eastern consulates, especially in Cairo, through the print and wireless media and through Italian philanthropic, educational, scholarly and financial institutions such as the Franciscan Terre Santa College in Tripoli and the Banco di Roma. By themselves, perhaps, these exertions might not have been cause for grave anxiety. But the *Duce* made no secret that he regarded the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*³⁹.

Indeed, *Duce's* original purpose in conceiving his Ethiopian adventure was essentially to buttress this emergent Mediterranean empire. The greater the hinterland supporting the Italian North African littoral, the more powerful Italy's strategic position in the Mediterranean itself. With his staging base along the African coast of the great middle sea, Mussolini could begin to look eastward towards Egypt and the Levant. Thus Italian naval construction mounted rapidly in the 1930s. Consisting of lightly armoured but unusually fast warships, requiring little of the endurance of French and British ocean-going vessels, this Mediterranean fleet soon outnumbered its French counterpart; while the Fascist naval air force was also considered to be swifter and more efficient than Britain's. It was held that the Italian air force was one of the largest in Europe and was steadily growing, due to production figures that were more impressive than those of France. The navy, in terms of modern naval tonnage, was not that far off the French mark and was considerably superior to all European navies in numbers of submarines. It was in fact the growth of Italian naval strength by the latter part of the decade that enabled Mussolini to challenge Allied domination of the Mediterranean basin⁴⁰.

At a rough estimate, the Italian navy by the end of 1937 was at least twice as strong (and having regard to its exceedingly up-to-date material probably three times as strong) as it was in 1926. In 1926 Italy had five pre-First World War battleships. In 1936 it had two 35,000-ton vessels, two modernized 27-knot vessels and two pre-First World War battleships. In 1926 it had no post-1918 cruisers. In 1936 it had 19, which were justly claimed to be the fastest in the world. In 1926 it had 33 post-1918 destroyers. In 1936 it had 73. But the most remarkable expansion had been in submarine strength. In 1926 Italy

³⁹ Archives du Ministère de la Défense, Service historique de l'Armée, Vincennes – henceforth referred to as "M.D." –, 7N 4190, File 3. Second Bureau Note, 7 April 1938.

⁴⁰ M.D., 7N 3052, File 1. Note, 25 December 1937.

possessed 54 submarines, but only 12 of these had been built since 1918 and the majority of the remainder were obsolete. In 1936 it had 88 submarines, all but 10 of which were of recent construction⁴¹.

Victory in Ethiopia whetted Mussolini's appetite for empire. He began to envision a vast African-Arabian domain that would parallel those of Britain and France. According to this scheme, Eritrea and Ethiopia became potential springboards for radiating Italian influence throughout the Arabian Peninsula and northward into Egypt. The formation of the Rome-Berlin axis on 1 November 1936 gave even clearer definition to this vision. Mussolini turned his back on Europe. That was to become a German preserve, especially in the north and east. In return Germans agreed that Italy's sphere of expansion was to be the Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. Italy, now more than ever before, insisted upon the freedom of the Mediterranean, for through that sea lay its only route to Ethiopia. The Mediterranean and Red Seas—with their connecting point, the Suez Canal—formed a vital link in the imperial communications of Italy. If the Suez Canal and its approaches were closed to Italy, it would be completely cut off from its East African Empire. The mortal dangers of its position in the Mediterranean, particularly in its eastern end, were dramatically brought home to Italy during the 241 days of economic siege applied against it by the League of Nations⁴².

Attached to peaceful reform and reconstruction at home, Turkey could not but view with apprehension these imperialistic manifestations. It was, therefore, irresistibly drawn towards closer cooperation with Britain and France, the two pillars of European status quo. In the aftermath of the Ethiopian crisis, during the period of 'pirate' submarine activity associated with the Spanish civil war, Turkey moved further in the same direction and made concrete promises of assistance and bases to ships of Nyon powers engaged in policing the Mediterranean. The trend towards rapprochement was reciprocal, since these two countries also needed Turkey's cooperation⁴³.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See, for instance, Tomaso Sillani, "The New Balance of Power in the Levant", *Foreign Affairs*, April 1939, pp.120-132.

⁴³ F.O. 371/10219, vol.21909. Rendel (Geneva) to F.O., 27 January 1938. Also M.A.E., T 1930-1940, Note by Lagarde, 26 July 1939, vol.472, pp.44-59.

In early November 1937 Italy adhered to the German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact, not for reasons of fighting communism, but as a matter of power politics. This associated Italy more closely with the Nazi type of fascist effort and Mediterranean countries could not but feel the threat of territory-hungry Italy growing. Italy withdrew from the League of Nations in December and in January 1938 announced a significant increase in its naval construction programme.

Ankara's distrust of Italy had deepened during 1938. Turkey disliked the policy of Rome-Berlin axis. It did not acquit Italy of designs in the eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish government was determined to defend not only its territory but also its liberty of action and it therefore saw itself inevitably involved in a fight for existence if either or both of the Axis powers were bent on expansion eastwards. It therefore made every sacrifice to strengthen its armed forces and its powers of defense. These reactions had quite naturally and logically confirmed Turkey more and more in its friendship with Britain and in its confident reliance on British power – especially sea power in the Mediterranean – as the one real barrier to the inordinate ambitions of Mussolini. Turkey, however, unlike some other powers, carefully calculated and was prepared to accept the risks and consequences of its attitude.

The West's response to the occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939, provided Turkey with the opening it had been looking for to arrive at a security arrangement in the Mediterranean. In reply to a hasty British inquiry as to Turkey's attitude to the *coup* in Czechoslovakia and the danger of a similar *coup* in Roumania, Ankara offered a broad hint that if the British government wished to make concrete proposals, Turkey would examine them in a friendly spirit. Şükrü Saraçoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs, seized the opportunity presented by the British communication to provide for Turkey's security in the eastern Mediterranean. On 21 March, Aras, the Turkish ambassador in London, sought out Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, to state officially and unequivocally that Turkey was prepared to go all lengths with Britain in the Mediterranean and that this decision was a fixed policy decided on before he left Ankara¹¹.

¹¹ British Documents on Foreign Policy – henceforth referred to as "B.D.F.P." –, ser.3, vol.4, no.s 423 and 424. Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara) to Halifax, 19 March 1939. And B.D.F.P., ser.3, vol.4, no.472. Halifax to Knatchbull-Hugessen (Ankara), 21 March 1939.

The occupation of Albania on 7 April 1939 brought Britain and France sharply against the realities of the Italian menace and constituted a decisive turning point in their policies. With the presence of Mussolini's armies on the Albanian soil, Italy became a Balkan power and a direct threat to the status quo in the Peninsula. When it was realized that the annexation of Albania marked merely the beginning of Italy's advance into the southeastern Europe, Western powers were forced to look for new allies. In this regard one of their most natural supporters could be Turkey. Britain and France readily agreed on the value of Turkey as an ally in a future war against Italy. The Dardanelles would be closed. This would strangle Italy's Black Sea trade, especially oil on which it was dependent. Ten percent of Italian trade and twentythree percent of Italian oil passed through the Turkish Straits. The Italian possessions in the Dodecanese Islands would become commitments for defense as opposed to vantage points for the war effort in southeastern Europe. The harbour at İzmir and Turkish air bases would be invaluable for the war effort in southeastern Europe. Moreover, Turkey could provide a supply route to Russia and the Balkans. Turkey's potential for buttressing the defenses of the Balkan states and for drawing upon the assistance of the Soviet Union was also recognized¹⁵.

Turkey unquestionably was a bulwark of peace in the Near and Middle East. The stature of modern Turkey in the counsels of the world was seen more clearly than ever before. Turkey was strong and was by no means to be frightened by bluff from whatever quarter. The nations of Western Europe looked to it with hope and confidence.

The Turkish press bitterly denounced Italy's aggression in Ethiopia and Albania and its general policy in the Mediterranean. In Turkish eyes especially, the Albanians, fellow Moslems, were a kindred people. In 1934, they had been invited to join the Balkan Pact by the Turks through their ambassador in Tirana, Ruşen Eşref Ünaydın. Events in Albania profoundly shocked public opinion in Turkey, but it had been expected that Mussolini, having failed to make headway in his claims on France, would find himself compelled to register successes elsewhere. No attempt was made to conceal the gravity of the consequences of the Italian occupation of Albania and it was realized that it might be used to influence the Balkan states and in case of war to dis-

¹⁵ CAB 53/47 COS 878 (JP). Alliance with Turkey, 15 April 1939. M.A.E., Private Papers of René Massigli, PA-AP:217, Massigli to M.A.E., 24 April 1939, vol.26, p.380.

rupt Balkan communications. The Turkish press gave free expression to alarm. The leading newspapers pointed out the danger which threatened all the Balkan countries and exhorted them to unity and cooperation if they were to prevent dire consequences from befalling each of them successively. The Italian occupation was likened in one newspaper to an outbreak of fire which might spread over the Balkans. Turkey could not but be gravely disturbed by the presence of Italian troops in the Balkans, more particularly because of its effects on Yugoslavia and Greece which, with Turkey and Roumania, formed the Balkan Entente. The newspapers wrote that the annexation of Albania made it clear that Italy had embarked on a deliberate policy of expansion and hegemony which should inevitably lead to the destruction of the independence of smaller countries. In consequence, Turkey could not calmly sit and watch the subjugation of one country after another; it should draw its own conclusions and act accordingly. Nevertheless, it was still felt that the initiative to prevent war or to save the smaller countries should lie with the great democracies, in particular with Britain, with whom Turkey was at heart in sympathy. Turkish newspapers also stated that the Islamic world in Asia and Africa had reacted with the utmost vigour to the assault on the independence of a predominantly Moslem Albania, that the conquest was considered as a blow at Islam and that the Moslems everywhere felt that the mask of the self-styled 'Protector of Islam' was off⁴⁶.

Since one of the remoter advantages flowing to Italy from the occupation of Albania was a closer control of the Adriatic against any eventual demands from the North and since nevertheless Nazi approval had been ostentatiously expressed, it might also be taken for granted that the plan was one of to which both the *Duce* and the *Führer* were parties. The mere control of Albania would not have, for its own sake, repayed so violent an action. The country was already an Italian protectorate, and could have no policy, at home or abroad, that was not acceptable in Rome. Clearly something more than a protectorate was necessary to the *Duce's* aims – he required a military occupation, indistinguishable from annexation. The aim, then, should be strategic; and the strategic importance of Albania was evident from a glance at the map. It was a bridgehead to the Balkans. A double pressure, northward upon Yugoslavia, southward upon Greece, could be employed with the

⁴⁶ See, for instance, the leading article of *Ulus*, 9 April 1939. Also *Cumhuriyet*, Editorial, 10 April 1939.

object of preventing the organization of concerted measures for defense and security and by the same action of promoting the counterveiling influence of the Axis. If a disruptive manoeuvre of this kind were to be attempted and to succeed, the victims immediately threatened would certainly not be the last. Beyond Yugoslavia and Greece lay Roumania and Turkey, states that might well suspect the initiation of such a policy as, if pursued by a non-totalitarian power, would be called a policy of successive encirclements.

Coming as one in a succession of aggressive manifestations, the threat was cumulative force. To some it was direct, to others indirect; but to all countries alike which valued their independence it was a compelling invitation to consider the necessities of self-defense. Following the occupation of Prague on 15 March 1939, Britain had already been compelled to make a "momentous departure" in foreign policy and had no choice but to pursue it with speed and decision. The threat to the free action of Yugoslavia was now double, coming on two sides from both the Axis powers. Before the invasion of Albania, Yugoslavia had watched the staff talks and concentration of troops on its northern frontier; and it was not difficult to say how much its strategic position was already undermined. In other capitals further east – Athens, Bucharest, Ankara – the governments felt better placed for mutual defense. The meetings of the Turkish and Roumanian Foreign Ministers, Şükrü Saraçoğlu and Grigore Gafencu, in İstanbul on 7 April indicated both that the members of the Balkan Entente were conscious of the new menace and that Turkey was determined to discharge its responsibility as guardian of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. These countries were entitled to look for counsel and practical sympathy from other powers equally determined to resist and defeat any attempt at European domination.

Given a satisfactory political agreement, sufficient aid and staff talks, Turkey would partner Britain in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The dominance of the Axis powers, Turks thought, was dangerous for the smaller nations, whether they were attacked or only menaced was immaterial. Italy, in the Mediterranean, was especially dangerous, and Turkey looked to a common interest with Britain in containing this danger to ensure its security. Soon after the annexation of Albania, Britain had to commit itself irrevocably to opposition to Italy. Consequently, it began to prepare its defenses. With international pressure and preparations to preserve its integrity in a hostile Europe, thoughts of coming to agreement with Turkey became easier

for Britain. Thus the Albanian affair set in motion the negotiations between Ankara and London. By April 1939, Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary preferred an arrangement whereby Turkey could give Britain an assurance of cooperation in the event of its being involved in war in the Mediterranean or the Balkans by reason of its guarantee to Greece and Roumania or in the case of a general war breaking out in which it was involved against Italy or Germany or both Italy and Germany. In return, Britain for its part would guarantee Turkey in the event of the latter's being involved in a war with either or both of Italy and Germany, however it arises¹⁷.

This Halifax suggestion was the father, in the first instance, of the Anglo-Turkish Declaration of 12 May 1939 and, in the second, of the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Tripartite Alliance of 19 October 1939. By 6 May, the Turkish and British governments had decided upon a draft of a mutual assistance treaty and the French were informed of its existence. On 12 May, Turkey and Britain, pending the conclusion of a long-term agreement, published a declaration of mutual collaboration and assistance in the event of an act of aggression leading to war in the Mediterranean and of the necessity of ensuring security in the Balkans. The declaration turned out to be the widest commitment Britain had yet made in its efforts to build up a European alliance against the Axis group. It was a complete accord on Anglo-Turkish cooperation against Axis aggression anywhere east of Italy¹⁸.

In Turkey, Refik Saydam, the Prime Minister, in the Grand National Assembly, said that Turkey had been neutral, but could be neutral no longer without jeopardizing its security. The threats in the Mediterranean and the Balkans were simply too obvious to ignore. "The best way" he told the deputies, "of saving Turkey from war was to associate it with those countries which were united together for peace and not shirking war if necessary. It is our conviction that the Mediterranean should be free to all nations on a footing of equality and any attempt to interfere with that freedom would endanger Turkish security. Believing this danger now exists, we have made up our minds to cooperate and, if necessary, to fight with those equally anxious to preserve peace." He insisted that Turkey was not threatening or attempting to encircle any nation, but would try to prevent any further encroachment

¹⁷ CAB 53/48 COS 882. Anglo-Turkish Staff Conversations, 19 April 1939.

¹⁸ *Hansard*, Commons Vol. CCXLVII, col 1814, 12 May 1939. Also F.O. 424/283 T6131/436/384. Halifax circular, 11 May 1939.

on the rights of others. This was only a beginning he assured deputies: negotiations were continuing with France, the Soviet Union and Turkey's Balkan allies⁴⁹.

The Turkish press was quick to seize on the declaration and to criticize with increasing boldness and virulence recent Italian and German actions. The time for totalitarian demands had passed, semi-official *Ulus* of 24 May warned: "the time had come to make claims on totalitarian states."

In the House of Lords, Lord Halifax described the declaration as the first step in the "building up of a peace front against aggression." He said that he hoped soon to be able to announce that the declaration had become a fully-fledged treaty of alliance. He concluded: "The attitude of friendly co-operation which the Turkish government has adopted throughout these discussions has been a source of the greatest satisfaction to His Majesty's Government, as it has been to the whole of the country, and I think it is the best augury for the consolidation of peace in the Mediterranean and southeastern Europe"⁵⁰.

From Rome, André François-Poncet, the French ambassador reported that Ciano was much angered by the declaration and that Mussolini made no attempt to disguise his distaste for this development⁵¹. "Mussolini" wrote Sir Percy Loraine, the British ambassador, on 27 June: "is almost inaccessible. He had either chosen, or has been persuaded, not to receive any foreigners but Germans. He seems moreover to be in a baddish humour. The main reason is probably the Anglo-Turkish Declaration. This seems to have taken him and the Italian government completely aback. Anglo-Turkish cooperation obviously puts a serious check on Italian liberty of manoeuvre, in the event of war, in the eastern Mediterranean and actually menaces the Italian naval and air bases in the Dodecanese. I suspect too that either Italian diplomacy has been caught napping as regards the trend of Turkish policy or has miscalculated it"⁵².

To Germany also the agreement was a bitter blow. The Germans, the news from Berlin went, were not fooled by the declaration and did not beli-

⁴⁹ *Anatolian News Agency*, 13 May 1939.

⁵⁰ *Hansard*, Lords Vol.CXIII, col 351, 12 May 1939.

⁵¹ D.D.F., ser.2, vol.16, no.316. François - Poncet to Bonnet, 13 May 1939.

⁵² F.O., 371/1011/77. Loraine (Rome) to King George VI, 27 June 1939.

eve for a second that it was limited to the Mediterranean alone. "Britain's pactomania continues to blossom", Joseph Goebbels, the German Propaganda Minister sneered. "We do not envy Turkey; it has let itself be lured away from a bilateral policy into the British encirclement ring. No good can come from that"⁵³.

From Ankara, a worried Franz Von Papen, the German ambassador wrote to stress to his superiors the importance of Turkey if war were contemplated with Britain. It meant, as he pointed out in a memorandum of 20 May, not only the loss of twenty years of German diplomatic investment in Turkey, but also a complete shift in the balance of power in the eastern Mediterranean. In a future war it might now be necessary for the Axis powers to seize Dardanelles, in order to exclude Britain from the Black Sea and Russia from the Mediterranean. Not that the closure of Dardanelles would alone suffice to ensure the defeat of Britain. To secure that it would be necessary for Germany to hit Britain in its most vital point, in India. To do this, the Axis powers had to possess the "land bridge to India" (Syria, Palestine and "access to Mosul"). The German ambassador noted that if Turkey fought on the British side, the Turkish forces would always be in a position to prevent this with the main part of its forces south of the Taurus mountains. Turkish neutrality could, in his view, best be obtained by persuading Italy to reassure Turkey regarding its position in Europe, while at the same time 'disguising' the development of the position in Albania and opening negotiations with respect to the islands of Castelrosso and Castelrizza (Meis), which lay within Turkey's three-mile territorial waters zone⁵⁴.

In Rome, a Ciano annoyed by continued German hectoring, presented to a shocked Joachim Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, wireless intercepts showing that the Turks were as hostile to Germany as to Italy⁵⁵. The Axis riposte to the declaration was the Pact of Steel of 23 May 1939. The most pessimistic of the appeasers' predictions had proved to be correct. Association of the sheep had led to a gathering of wolves⁵⁶.

⁵³ M.A.E., T 1930-1940, Coulondre (Berlin) to M.A.E., 10 June 1939, vol.628, pp.151-152. Also *Bulletin of International Affairs*, Vol.16, No.10 (20 May 1939), p.39.

⁵⁴ Documents on German Foreign Policy - henceforth referred to as "D.G.F.P." -, ser.D, vol.6, no.413. Von Papen memorandum, 20 May 1939. Also Franz Von Papen, *Memoirs*, London, 1952, pp.446-447.

⁵⁵ Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano Diary 1939-1943*, London, 1947. Entry for 21 May 1939.

⁵⁶ B.D.F.P., ser.3, vol.5, no.424. Lorraine (Rome) to Halifax, 9 May 1939. See also M. Toscano, *The Origin of the Pact of Steel*, Baltimore, 1967, pp.250-340.

It should here be remarked that there was really no division on policy in Turkey. Whether internally or externally, the nation was solid. It presented a united front, whether from the point of view of domestic development or in regard to foreign politics. No power which might have hoped to split the Turkish nation had the slightest hope of success, for it knew its own mind and would inflexibly pursue it. It needed no one to point out to it where its best interest lay. There had been perceptible since Atatürk's death of 10 November 1938 not a hint of weakening in the national will which some observers had thought might adversely affect the structure of Turkey.

Meanwhile the French press was filled with praise of the Anglo-Turkish Declaration and urged the French government to do likewise. *Le Temps*, often used as a mouthpiece for the Quai d'Orsay, observed in its copy of 13 May 1939 editorially, "it is necessary to conclude, and quickly, a friendly gesture to Turkey before it is too late that it will lose all value. There is still time, but there is no time to be lost."

Unquestionably, few had doubts about Turkey's great geopolitical and strategic value for France, the "key", as Charles Corbin, the French ambassador in London called it, to the Black Sea, the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey's threat to the Italian Dodecanese, its control of the sea gate to Russia and its ability to expedite troop transports from the Near East to the much thought-about bridgehead at Salonica were all acknowledged and prized. As maneuvering among the powers in the diplomatic prelude to the Second World War became more tense, Turkey's position in Continental and Mediterranean diplomacy grew daily in importance⁵⁷.

On 23 June, having finally been brought to agree to the return of the district of Hatay to Turkey, France adhered to the Anglo-Turkish Declaration. In this way it was believed that France and Britain had jointly assured the defense by the Turkish nation and the army of the gateway of the East against all comers. Turkish Prime Minister, Refik Saydam, stated in the Grand National Assembly that the Franco-Turkish Declaration was not directed against any power and that it was aimed only at the maintenance of peace. This agreement harmonized Anglo-Franco-Turkish relations and com-

⁵⁷ Georges Bonnet, *De Munich à la Guerre*, Paris, 1967, pp.270-271.

bined their energies for the protection of peace in the Mediterranean and the Balkans⁵⁸.

The Italian press denounced the Anglo-Franco-Turkish rapprochement as a violation of the Anglo-Italian arrangement of 16 April 1938 for the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean. The semi-official weekly *Relazioni Internazionali* of 27 June attacked the French policy in the Near East and the terms of the Franco-Turkish Agreement as a direct threat to Italy. A definite long-term tripartite alliance between Britain, France and Turkey was to be concluded on 19 October 1939.

Although structured on the basis of the Anglo-Turkish Declaration of 12 May, the tripartite alliance went even further by reinforcing some of its clauses and including a clear-cut definition of the conditions under which the obligations for mutual aid should come into force. The rapprochement between Turkey and Britain began with the Italian encroachment on Ethiopia and culminated in the conclusion of the Anglo-Franco-Turkish Mutual Assistance Treaty.

Following the conclusion of the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 24 July 1923 establishing the basis of the new state, Turkey began to follow a foreign policy guided by the fundamental principle of priority of peace, sovereignty and domestic development over foreign adventurism or, expressed differently, the preservation of national independence and territorial integrity, as defined by the National Pact of 28 January 1920. The cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy was therefore peace, "peace at home, peace in the world", as President Atatürk himself expressed it. The Turks have had as great a stake in the preservation of peace as has had any other status quo country. Concentrated as it was upon internal reconstruction, Turkey could be reckoned as a status quo power. Its aim was to avoid disturbance; it was therefore a stabilizing factor, and, owing to the weight it carried with its neighbours, was the key to stability in the Near East.

Turkish foreign policy was based on negotiation and law. Turkish leaders tried to persuade the representatives of other powers by inducements and appeals to reason, magnanimity, self-interest, pride or even fear. Through manipulation of words or statements to the press and radio, Ankara sought favourable responses to its policies and sections. If the others could

⁵⁸ *Anatolian News Agency*, 24 June 1939.

not be persuaded to adopt a position or action desired, attempts were made to ascertain what compromise was feasible. Sometimes this could be achieved by reference to existing treaties and sometimes by innovation. The fact that it had secured the change in the Straits régime peacefully was in marked contrast to the lawlessness of the European dictators and added considerably to its prestige. Atatürk had neither provoked trouble nor taken advantage of the weakness of other powers to grab territory to which, according to international law, he had no right. Turkey had stood by its agreements and treaties with other governments. Atatürk, in cooperation with a competent Turkish government, had concentrated his efforts within the boundaries of his own country, modernized and developed it. Turkey's national energies were almost entirely concentrated on developments at home. Abroad its only desire was for the long-term Mediterranean and European peace which would enable it to pursue its programme undisturbed.

Turkey dreaded Italy's revisionism. Mussolini's indiscreet remarks concerning the Mediterranean as a '*mare nostrum*' and his undisguised ambitions in the Near East, together with the Italian possession of the strategic Dodecanese Islands just off the Turkish coast, filled Turkish leaders with grave concern. Turkey's anxieties of Italy were not unfounded. Turkey had not forgotten Italy's First World War aspirations extending over all of '*mare nostrum*' and even on into Anatolia, despite the fact that these had failed to materialize. Mussolini's speeches of 1925, especially that of December 1925, threatening to invade this same Anatolia and his major speech of 1934 referring to Italy's 'historic mission' in Africa and Asia were still fresh in mind. The reinforcement of Italian military installations on the islands of Rhodes and Leros had precipitated serious apprehensions regarding Turkish security.

In the fall of 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia. This event which marked the beginning of a series of faithless aggressive acts in other fields, proved how justified were the worries of Turkish diplomacy. After Italy had been proclaimed an aggressor and the Nyon Agreement had been concluded, Turkey and Britain, both especially interested in the security of the Mediterranean, found for the first time since the First World War, means of knowing, understanding and cooperating with each other in a practical field of common interest. The Mediterranean remained the focal point of major Turkish anxieties. In this sphere Turkey's determination to act in accord with Britain

stayed intact. It was willing to welcome an opportunity of improving its relations with Italy, but only in the wake of a British lead. Ankara held to the axiom that a predominance of British naval strength in the Mediterranean spelt safety for Turkey.

Italy and Germany were on the verge of creating a fascist hegemony in the Mediterranean and Europe. Britain and France were confronted with the dilemma of maintaining communications in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India. In order to do this, it was imperative that Turkey should either remain neutral or be induced to join Britain and France – any means were to be used to prevent Turkey from joining the Axis.

Turkey, owing to its relative strategic, diplomatic and moral advantages, was well able to resist and repel the Italian pressures on it. Italy feared that Turkey, which possessed air and sea bases in western and southwestern Anatolia, could pose a menace to its imperial sea routes in the eastern Mediterranean, running through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea. Moreover, under the Montreux Convention, Turkey, if at war or, when it felt itself threatened by war, had the right of exercising complete discretion in closing the Straits. This development was ensuring Turkey an increasingly important voice in future questions involving the eastern Mediterranean area. Nor was this all. Oil, on account of its weight and volume, was transported whenever possible by sea; Turkish guns commanded the passage through which passed one-fourth of Italian oil import. Italy did not have direct control over any major oil reserves.

The government of Ankara's diplomatic strength essentially derived from the fact that it was a cordial friend of Britain after the Italian conquest of Ethiopia, an ally of the Soviet Union since 1925 and the founder and leading partner of the Balkan Entente and Saadabad Pact – alliances which stabilized the southeastern European and Middle Eastern regions. Turkey's entry into the League of Nations confirmed its peaceful intentions and its rapprochement to the status quo camp in Europe. For a medium power Turkey took an active part in League affairs. It cooperated with League efforts to maintain collective security. The fact that Turkey held a seat on the Council of the League from 1934 to 1937 provided it prestige and influence on an international scale. It recognized the full implications of Mussolini's policy of regaining the Roman Empire for Italy.

Turkey's moral force was mainly due to its national unity and discipline, domestic cohesiveness, its people's will to fight for its national cause if necessary, firmness and determination of its government, the skill of its diplomacy and the strong leadership of its Presidents, Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü. Turkish nation which enjoyed so great a measure of internal stability was in a position to adopt a forward foreign policy. Military power had also been present in the background of Turkish diplomacy, available to be called upon, if need be, to help achieve policy goals. This was a major element of Turkey's prestige and could speak louder than words.

In the period between the two world wars, Turkey owed its ability to play a role in international affairs much superior to its actual resources chiefly to the personality of one man, its President Atatürk. He was both democratic and non-aggressive. Turkey owed its power to the genius of its leader. The strength of Turkish diplomacy lay in the mind of Atatürk himself. The successes Turkish diplomacy achieved during the Mediterranean crisis in the 1930s were the work of one man's mind. Events would almost always later confirm Atatürk's judgements on various stages of the conflict.

On the other hand, through a number of agreements and provision of financial assistance, Turkey had at the same time maintained close and advantageous economic relations with Germany and these ties, in turn, led to the furtherance of friendship between the two countries. And since its Foreign Minister's visit to Milan in 1937 Turkey gradually began to clear the areas of misunderstanding between itself and Italy. It should be noted that the Spanish civil war, like the war in Ethiopia, had at this time involved a diversion of Italian power from possible Anatolian objectives.

The balance of power in Europe and the Mediterranean arranged by the post-1918 peace settlement was upset in favour of the Axis powers and a new realignment of forces was needed to re-establish it. In London and Paris it was calculated that the Axis power combination which gained a foothold in central and eastern Europe and the Mediterranean might also easily achieve a decisive advantage in the overall European balance of power.

Turkey's interests in international affairs began to run generally parallel to those of Britain following the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and basically on account of this fact an Anglo-Turkish rapprochement had started to take shape since 1935. Therefore, within this process and especially after the oc-

cupation of Prague by Germany, Britain expected Turkey to support and join the Anglo-French camp to restore the balance of power in Europe. The occupation of Albania by Italy further accelerated the pace. Turkey, as a potential ally in the eastern Mediterranean, had enough strength to tip the balance against Italy if it formed a coalition with Britain and France. Thus in 1939, for the first time, was formed an association of nations determined to oppose domination by force.

