

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF THE TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY UNDER ATATÜRK

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The fifteen years during which the Republican Turkey had been in existence under Kemal Atatürk's leadership were filled with an almost incredible activity in every field—including the foreign affairs. Few more surprising metamorphoses were recorded in history than the transformation which in the course of one decade and a half had changed old Turkey into a progressive modern country and a pillar of peace and stability in the Balkan Peninsula, in the eastern Mediterranean and in Western Asia. Turkey enjoyed the respect of all. No one dreamed of interfering in its internal affairs. Its neighbours, far from watching for opportunities to despoil it, were anxious to cultivate its friendship and they welcomed its co-operation in maintaining their common interests. Turkish diplomacy, in the period between the two world wars, wise and moderate as it showed itself, as well as vigorous and far-seeing, could not have accomplished so much if it had not been supported by radical reforms at home removing old shackles and inhibitions and opening the way for a tremendous revival of national energy and for a great development of national resources, both economic and cultural.

The Turkish Constitution of 1924 had reserved a special foreign policy role to the President of the Republic. The President was well acquainted with the nation's diplomatic and security concerns. Atatürk had able lieutenants and devoted followers; but the realism and radicalism that marked Turkish foreign and internal policy since the foundation of the Republic were the fruit of his original genius. In him were embodied, both the superior energy and statesmanship of the born leader. The conduct of foreign policy rested on the characteristics and qualities of the President. Turkey owed its ability to play a role in world politics much superior to its actual resources chiefly to the personality of one man, its head of state.

As a statesman, Atatürk possessed great qualities: intellectual ability to contemplate any situation dispassionately and rationally and think

through the logical consequences of a course of action; marvellous ability to calculate the chances and a highly developed sense of the possible; clear-sighted concentration on the essential objective and inflexible will in driving towards his goal. In his capacity as head of state, Atatürk wielded impressive power owing to the unique prestige and confidence which he enjoyed among his fellow-countrymen. Turkey was indebted for its might to the extraordinary stature of its leader. The strength of Turkish foreign policy lay in the immense driving spirit of Atatürk himself. The successes Turkish diplomacy achieved during the interwar period were the work of one man's mind. Events would almost always later confirm Atatürk's judgements. Predictions on international affairs of the exceptionally able and far-seeing Turkish President proved faultless¹.

Since its foundation in 1923, the Republic of Turkey followed a policy aiming consciously at international peace and neutrality. What the new administration needed most was a breathing-space in which to modernise the country and reorganise its economic life. The chief objective of Turkish foreign policy then was the maintenance of security and stability in the Balkan Peninsula and the Middle East and the furtherance of understanding among the nations of these regions which would save them from being forced into one or other of the fronts into which Europe risked being divided. It was a policy of friendship, reconciliation and guarantee against war, so long as neighbours were willing to respect the integrity and independence of the new Republic and its territories. The foreign policy which Atatürk always inspired and sometimes directed brought Turkey into the comity of Western nations and made new friends with old foes. The welfare of the Turkish nation was his first concern. He saw it in terms of harmony and fraternity; never in terms of war and conquest. Atatürk's influence in foreign relations was for peace. He believed in the brotherhood of man and urged the nations to be friends. Not only was Turkey stable in itself, it was also a stable factor in a distressed and uncertain world, it knew its mind; it knew its friends; it

¹ In 1932, Chief of the General Staff of the United States army General Douglas MacArthur had an interview with Atatürk in which the latter described what he thought to be the likely course of events over the next decade and a half. Germany would start a war in the time period 1940-1945. Italy would be drawn in. France would collapse. The war would spread to encompass the Soviet Union and the United States. Germany would be destroyed. The war would end with the Soviet Union and the United States the only real Great Powers remaining. *Caucasus*, 1, 1951, p. 16.

steadfastly pursued its course; it kept its engagements. From a state which had once been regarded as an intruder in Europe Turkey became under Atatürk's leadership a valuable and progressive member of the European body politic².

After the Lausanne Treaty, which delimited the country's boundaries and determined its place among the nations, the basic foreign policy of Turkey was one of friendship with all its neighbours and non-involvement in Great Power politics. Turkey based its foreign policy on the position of neutrality and had avoided committing itself to membership of either of the two armed camps which were in the process of formation in Europe. What Turkey wanted was to accomplish its internal reconstruction in peace and for that purpose it considered that neutrality was its best policy. The first principle of Turkish foreign policy was, and remained, the close friendly relations with the Soviet Union; the second principle was the Balkan Entente and the third, by 1935, was that of rapprochement with the West—primarily with Britain³.

Cordial bonds united Turkey with the Soviet Union. It was the attitude of the Soviet Union which during the difficult years of the War of Liberation made it easier for Turkey to show Europe a confident and brave front; and it was the Soviet Union's action in renouncing the old Russian capitulations and concessions in Turkey which contributed considerably to the preparation of the way for the country's economic regeneration. The Soviet Union felt that its fight against the West was being furthered by the national revolutions in the Near East which were supplanting antiquated monarchies, dependent on the West, with young and emancipated governments. This in no way implied any community of ideas nor was to be taken as showing that Soviet doctrines had made any headway in Turkey. On the contrary, the new Turkey was quite successful in its endeavours to prevent alien ideological propaganda from taking

² For a detailed account of Atatürk's peaceful intentions in foreign policy, see Roderic Davison, "Peaceful Foreign Relations: An Achievement of Atatürk", *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* (Review of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Ankara), 36, 1981, pp. 167-178.

³ Cevat Açıkalın, "Turkey's International Relations", *International Affairs*, 23, 1947, pp. 477-482.

root within its frontiers. It was purely an association of interests that brought together Ankara and Moscow⁴.

As early as 16 March 1921 the government of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey concluded a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union, in the preamble of which was provided that the two parties affirmed that, in their struggle for liberation, the peoples of the east were at one with the Soviet Union and emphatically proclaimed the right of the peoples of the east to liberty and independence and a form of government in accordance with their own desires. The Turco-Soviet relationship became further closer on 17 December 1925 by the signature of the Treaty of Neutrality and Non-aggression which contained stipulations against joining blocs or forming alliances with third parties which might be directed against the co-signatory and against participating in blockades, boycotts or any policy of encirclement of a financial or economic nature. On 7 November 1935, an agreement was made in Paris to extend the treaty for another ten years.

Turkey and the Soviet Union were neighbours in Asia; they were both vitally interested in the protection of the entrance to the Black Sea; they had avoided any serious ideological quarrel, although their Constitutions and their national cultures and ideals differed so widely. Good relations with Russia, in the context of friendship rather than subordination, guaranteed Turkey's continued security on its long eastern frontier and in the Black Sea. Russia was, moreover, a reliable source of much needed manufactured goods and Turkey's default supplier of war material. Subsequent alliances were viewed as complementary to the relationship with the Soviet Union rather replacements for it. Since the Republic of Turkey came into existence, the main background of Turkish foreign policy had been friendship with the Soviets. For example, when Turkey was elected to the Council of the League of Nations on 17 September 1934, it strongly supported the admission of the Soviet Union the following day⁵.

⁴ Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk* (The Grand Speech), Vol. 1, Ankara, 1974, p. 93. See also S.I. Aralov, *Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Hatıraları* (Memoirs of a Soviet Diplomat in Turkey), Translated from Russian by Hasan Ali Ediz, Istanbul, 1967, pp. 87-88 and 102-104. Aralov was the first Soviet ambassador at Ankara between 1922 and 1923.

⁵ Ahmet Şükrü Esmer, *Turkey and the United Nations*, New York, 1961, p. 38.

Turco-Soviet friendship was based on powerful military realities. The Soviets were the strongest power on the Black Sea; they shared a long border with the Turks in the Caucasus; if the Mediterranean were closed, stores would have to come from the Soviets and Russia was possessed of armed forces which the Turks were disposed to rate highly. İsmet İnönü, Premier between 1923 and 1937, in particular continually stressed the importance of Turkey's close friendly relations with the Soviet Union. But Turkey's politics were not taken in tow by Moscow. After achieving its complete independence, and while fully preserving it, Turkey meant to observe neutrality between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers⁶.

The prudent maintenance of friendly relations with the Soviet Union did not prevent Turkey from establishing good ties with Britain; from entering into an understanding with Greece which ripened into an alliance; and from concluding pacts with the neighbouring states of the Balkans and Western Asia. The understanding with Moscow was the sheet-anchor of Turkish foreign policy, but once the question of Mosul was settled, Turco-British relations gradually began to improve. One of Atatürk's reasons for desiring friendly relations with Britain arose from his wish to avoid becoming too dependent on one power. He saw that it was necessary to establish cordial relations with Turkey's mighty northern neighbour, the Soviet Union. The sensible policy would therefore be to balance this by correspondingly close relations with Britain, another major power with interest near Turkey. The Turks had shown their pro-British leanings in 1934 by the offer of refuge in Turkish harbours to the British Mediterranean Fleet. Following the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and basically on account of this fact a Turco-British rapprochement started to take shape since 1935. Close co-operation between Turkey and Britain during the Montreux Conference of 1936 leading to the signature of the new Straits Convention further accelerated the pace. According to the British ambassador at Ankara, Sir Percy Loraine, relations with Britain, rather than relations with any other Power, slowly became the keystone of the arch of Turkish policy. Turkey's foreign policy gravitated more and more to harmonisation on the wider issues of peace, security and

⁶ See, in particular, *İsmet İnönü'nün TBMM ve CHP Kurultaylarında Söylev ve Demeçleri (1919-1946)* [İsmet İnönü's Speeches and Statements in the Turkish Grand National Assembly and in the Conventions of the Republican People's Party (1919-1946)], Istanbul, 1946, pp. 280, 292 and 321. Speeches of 5 July 1934, 7 March 1935 and 14 June 1938.

European reorganisation with that of Britain and became more indifferent to France except in so far as French policy followed the British lead. As regards League of Nations affairs Turkish eyes and ears were turned far more hopefully to London than to Paris⁷.

After the conclusion of the Montreux Convention there existed, as Tevfik Rüştü Aras –Foreign Minister for thirteen consecutive years between 1925 and 1938– stated, a complete identity of interests between Turkey and Britain. Turkish overtures for cementing the existing co-operation began shortly after Montreux. Turco-British friendship was further advanced by the cordial reception given to İnönü when he visited London for the Coronation of George VI in the summer of 1937. Speaking of this visit İnönü stated: "It is a pleasure for me to declare that our relations with Britain are based on friendship and real confidence. When I was in Britain I remarked sentiments of sincere friendship towards Turkey among the most authorised individuals of the British nation; and the most responsible statesmen have shown that they would be happy to see me carrying back with me to Turkey sentiments of the sincere and cordial friendship that Britain nourishes towards Turkey. Not only in official but also in private circles confidence and sympathy is manifested towards Turkey. We find Britain's conduct in pursuit of the cause of peace fully in conformity with our spirit. The sentiment of confidence between our two countries will be very useful for the developing of our reciprocal relations, and will be a precious factor tending towards the cause of international peace and towards an atmosphere of security"⁸.

The primary importance of the rapprochement with Britain, however, lay in the belief of all important Turkish statesmen that if it came to a war Britain ultimately must win. After 1934 most leading Turks seem to have been convinced that they lived in a pre-war period. Turkish confidence in British strength was not in question and sprang naturally from Turkey's

⁷ Text of Sir Percy Loraine's speech broadcast on the BBC as tribute to Atatürk on 10 November 1948, the tenth anniversary of Atatürk's death. Loraine was the British ambassador to Turkey from 1934 to 1939. He was one of the most active and influential foreign diplomatic representatives in the Turkish capital at the time. He wrote admirable reports on Turkey and formed a very shrewd opinion of the strength and solidity of the Republican administration. This address has been republished by the British Council on the occasion of the 75th year celebrations of the Turkish Republic. *Turkish Daily News*, Special Supplement on Atatürk, 29 October 1998.

⁸ İnönü's Speeches (1946), p. 323. Speech of 14 June 1937.

own experience on the losing side of the First World War. In 1937, Aras explained to the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden that Atatürk believed that the defeat of the Axis Powers was inevitable once Britain had entered the war. Britain had always, and would always, win; and if it could not do so with its own strength, it would always be able to bring in the United States as a final calamity⁹. "Britain", Aras said to Loraine, "was not merely a power, but a world power: it was ubiquitous: its interests lay everywhere"¹⁰. In the pre-war years, while recognising that the Germans were powerful, as they were in 1914, the Turks were also inclined to believe that in a conflict with Britain, they would lose, as they had in 1918¹¹.

Many manifestations of mutual Turco-British good will marked the last few years of Atatürk's presidency. King Edward VIII roused enthusiasm by visiting Turkish ports; a British company of engineers were appointed consultants to the Turkish government for all public works; Messrs. Brassett were awarded the three million pounds contract for building the Turkish iron and steel industry at Karabük, payment to be effected by the sale, through special organisations to be established in Turkey and Britain, of selected Turkish products such as minerals. The process reached its peak in May 1938, when the British government granted Turkey a credit of sixteen million pounds of which six million pounds was to be devoted to armament purchases from British firms, the balance to commercial purchases sponsored by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Not only complete reconciliation was achieved with Britain, but the growth of the closest and most cordial relations was also registered¹².

After Turkey had been successful in transforming into friendship its traditional enmity towards Russia, its northern neighbour, it turned its attention towards removing, under even more difficult circumstances, the tension existing between itself and Greece, its neighbour across the Aegean. Atatürk and his lieutenants and the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos too, recognised that the persistence of the Turco-Greek quarrels after the exchange of populations effected by the Treaty of

⁹ Foreign Office Papers, Public Record Office, London § henceforth referred to as "F.O." § 371/954/28. Eden (Geneva) to F.O., 26 January 1937.

¹⁰ Ibid., Loraine (Ankara) to Eden, 24 February 1937.

¹¹ Louis Réville, "La Turquie et la crise européenne", *Politique Etrangère*, 5, 1938, p. 504.

¹² F.O. 371/21921.E/3164/67/44. F.O. to Loraine (Ankara), 27 May 1938.

Lausanne was an anachronism. The disagreement with Greece was ended and replaced by close relations. In 1930, Venizelos visited Ankara, where, aided by Atatürk, he inaugurated the Turco-Greek Entente, which developed into a virtual alliance in 1933. The hatchets with Athens were buried. This event marked an outstanding achievement of statesmanship, one which constituted a real landmark in the history of the two nations. The establishment of friendly relations between Turkey and Greece was in a way the consummation of the peaceful policy which had been Atatürk's aim during the past ten years.

As a European power, Turkey had a role among the Balkan states. Since the end of the First World War, some of the Great Powers had been rivals for ascendancy in the Balkan Peninsula; and the tension between certain of the individual states there had if anything become higher than it was at the time of the conclusion of the peace treaties. In view of these circumstances, Ankara was careful to observe in Europe the same policy of neutrality and friendship with everybody which it practised in Asia. Turkey took a leading part in the Balkan conferences and concluded the pact of the Balkan Entente in 1934 with Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania, to guard against aggression in the region. The signatories guaranteed the inviolability of their respective Balkan frontiers and undertook to consult with one another in the event of any threat in their area. The regional feuds were extinguished by the Balkan Entente Treaty; Bulgaria alone abstaining from participation¹³.

Turkey hailed the establishment of a community of interests among the Balkan states, since that would help to insure peace and to eliminate the influence and rivalry of Great Powers. Atatürk greatly contributed to the idea of co-operation between the Balkan countries and to the continuation and preservation of peace in the region. The Balkan Pact, Premier İnönü told the Grand National Assembly, was an instrument of great value for international reconciliation. It was fundamental to Turkish thinking that war must be kept out of the Balkans and, if this proved impossible, that a common Balkan response against an external threat be assured. Equally fundamental was that the Balkan states must be prevented

¹³ *Cumhuriyetin İlk On Yılı ve Balkan Paktı (1923-1934)* [The First Ten Years of the Republic and the Balkan Pact (1923-1934)], Publication of the Directorate General of Research and Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ankara, 1973, pp. 308-368.

from squabbling among themselves. Indeed, these two principles were linked because if Balkan harmony could be assured it was much more likely that the peninsula could be insulated against external threats and also more probable that internal problems would not spread prompting the Great Powers to intervene, as in 1914. As the most powerful regional state, Turkey took a lively interest in all Balkan questions and tended to set its strategic frontier on the Danube. It is in this context that Turkey was the moving spirit in the efforts to reconcile differences between the other members of the Balkan Entente and Bulgaria¹⁴.

Turkish friendship with the Balkan Entente partners stood all strains and developed. Turkey endeavoured to act as mediator for the settlement of all Balkan disagreements. Aras became president of the Balkan Entente Council on 9 February 1936 — the second anniversary of its foundation. In an interview which he gave the same day to a representative of the influential newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, he summarised the policy of Entente as "peace and friendship between the Balkan states: peace and order in Europe: finally, world peace. Fidelity to the system of collective security and textual execution of engagements undertaken towards the League of Nations". No effort was spared by Ankara to enlarge the scope of the Balkan Entente. That the Turks watched developments in eastern Mediterranean with growing concern and sought other fields for protection was only natural. Nevertheless right up to the outbreak of the world conflict the Turkish policy remained unswervingly loyal to the principles of the Balkan Entente; and its statesmen sought all possible means to avert the break-up of the Balkan unity.

But the moderating and stabilising influence of Ankara was by no means confined to the Balkan Peninsula. Turkey was also an Asiatic power and it wanted tranquillity on its eastern frontiers. The Four-Power Non-aggression Pact, otherwise known (from its place of signature) as the Saadabad Pact, was concluded between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan on 8 July 1937, in substantially the same form as that in which it had been initialled at Geneva on 2 October 1935. The successful outcome of the negotiations was largely due to the personal efforts of Aras in bringing the parties together in the course of a visit which he paid to Baghdad and Teheran immediately before the signature of the pact. Aras

¹⁴ İnönü's Speeches (1946), p. 292. Speech of 7 March 1935.

was, in particular, instrumental in removing the outstanding difficulties between Iraq and Iran in connexion with the Shatt-el-Arab frontier dispute, thus opening the way to a general settlement. This treaty provided for close and friendly relations among its contracting parties and Turkey's position in the Middle East was thus reinforced. Saadabad Pact was a guarantee of peace on the eastern border of Turkey. Aras thus explained to Loraine that the pact represented a removal of a constant source of anxiety on Turkey's eastern frontiers, a narrowing down by the area of the four contracting parties of the field for speculation in terms of military or power politics helping to close a large region of the south-west of Asia to adventurous policies by ambitious states¹⁵.

Turkey's part in this new pact had been as active and enthusiastic as the part its statesmen had played in helping to arrive at a Balkan Entente. Saadabad Pact marked the first attempt to set up a Middle Eastern security arrangement confined to states indigenous to the area. In part it was designed as a regional bloc at the League of Nations. The first meeting of the permanent council of the pact took place the day the treaty was signed, when it agreed to advance for Turkey a claim to a semi-permanent seat at the Council of the League of Nations analogous to those awarded to Poland and Spain in 1927. The weight of Ankara in regional counsels was never so considerable as it was then¹⁶.

The real beneficiary of the Saadabad Pact, according to Ambassador René Massigli, was Turkey which had managed to re-establish its moral suzerainty and assured its intellectual, economic and political influence over the major Moslem countries of Western Asia. Turkish friendship with the three other signatories of the treaty ripened. Under the direction of Atatürk and as a result of increasing expenditure on armaments, successive five-year plans of self-sufficiency and the construction of important strategic railways, Turkey had risen to a position second to none amongst its neighbours in military strength and efficiency¹⁷.

¹⁵ F.O. 371/20860. Loraine (Ankara) to Eden, 26 July 1937.

¹⁶ *Montreux ve Savaş Öncesi Yılları (1935-1939)* [Montreux and Pre-War Years (1935-1939)], Publication of the Directorate General of Research and Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ankara, 1973, pp. 151-156. See also F.O. 371/23301. Annual Report on Turkey, 1937. Para. 36.

¹⁷ French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Paris § henceforth referred to as "M.A.E." §, Private Papers of René Massigli, PA-AP: 217, Note on the Saadabad Pact, 10 November 1938, Vol. 23, p. 5. René Massigli had been a leading figure at the Quai d'Orsay for over a decade and he acted as Political Director. He also served as ambassador of France to Ankara between 1939 and 1940.

Turkey was the leader not only of the Middle East, but also of the Balkan Peninsula. The pre-eminence of Turkey among those both to the eastward and westward was an indisputable fact. It bestrided beneficially both Asia and Europe: its influence extended from the Danube to the northwest frontier of India. The advance of Turkish influence in southeastern Europe and in the Middle East had been most impressive. Turkey was in effect the lynch-pin of the Balkan Entente and the Saadabad Pact. The new Turkey was thus able to strengthen in a remarkable way its position towards its neighbours over what it was in the past. In Europe as in Asia, evidence of Turkey's desire for a liquidation of the old antagonisms was clear. The "Eastern Question", in consequence may be said to have assumed a totally different aspect. It was primarily due to the foresight and energy of Atatürk himself.

Turkey, devoted to peace, confident in its strength, remained the pivot of the Balkan Entente. In particular Turkey adopted the conception of the non-division of Europe into opposing camps; it found that this was no bar, but rather an encouragement, to the development of regional groups such as the Balkan Entente, formed for the defence of regional interests, the cultivation of regional solidarity, and the protection of the Balkan area at least against use as a play ground by the rivalries of Great Powers. Turkey unquestionably was also a bulwark of peace in the Middle East. The stature of modern Turkey in the counsels of the world was seen more clearly than ever before.

By these pacts and alliances Turkey had done more than enhance its importance as the bridge between Europe and Asia and provide for regional collective security. It had assisted in securing a genuine base for peace, since, as a preliminary to signature of the pacts, a number of long-standing quarrels and points of friction were removed. Thus before the Saadabad Pact was signed, Turkey and Iran, Iraq and Iran, Afghanistan and Iran had come to an understanding on boundary disputes and on matters of tribal control, by itself a source of centuries of friction between Turkey and Iran.

Turkey won a signal diplomatic triumph at Montreux on 20 July 1936, where it regained full sovereignty over the Dardanelles and Bosphorus from the Powers which had signed the Straits Convention of 24 July 1923. New fortresses on the banks of the Straits of Çanakkale and Istanbul

heightened both the diplomatic strength and strategic influence of Turkey. Under the terms of the Montreux Convention Turkey controlled the passage of all warships through the Straits, not only in war time but when it might "consider itself to be threatened with imminent danger of war". Turkish friendship was therefore highly desirable to Mediterranean powers and virtually essential to the Black Sea states. 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 should pass almost the whole of Russian and Romanian oil exports¹⁸.

During the few years subsequent to the Montreux success an ingenious combination of new diplomatic methods and old won back the district of Hatay to Turkey. In the negotiations on the question the attitude of the Turkish government was conciliatory and correct and only on one occasion the head of state intervened personally in the conduct of the policy which he had so largely inspired. This was at an early stage of the dispute, when he encountered the French unwillingness to meet Turkish demands that the district should obtain local independence by travelling in a special train to an Army Corps headquarters near the southern frontier. France finally agreed with Turkey and made it certain that Hatay would soon be reunified with the mother country. The Turkish government, with the concurrence of the French and the acquiescence of the League of Nations, had won a decisive victory. Situated at the cross-roads between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and the Balkans and Middle East, Turkey occupied a pivotal position in French appreciation of that part of the world. As mistress of the Dardanelles, buffer between fascism and the troubled French Moslem Empire and an acknowledged independent power among weak dependencies, Turkey counted. The settlement was a brilliant accomplishment by all standards. Ankara resumed cordial relations with Paris. Under Atatürk's auspices Turkish diplomacy ran from one success to another.

Atatürk was essentially a realist. Facts, not fancies, dominated Ankara. The Turkish leader did not conduct foreign policy from theory, but according to the dictates of geography and the needs of the time. The new Turkey was a medium-sized country with a population of sixteen million

¹⁸ Full text of the Montreux Straits Convention in League of Nations Treaty Series, No. 4015, Vol. 173 (1936-1937), pp. 213-241.

bordering on huge Soviet Union with its two hundred million people and exposed to the influence of the naval powers which dominated the Mediterranean. Thus, no matter how perfect Turkey's political and military machine was, its strength had obvious limitations. One of the great merits of Atatürk was his sober realisation of these limitations and his moderate, realistic foreign policy, which corresponded to the strength of his country¹⁹.

Turkey distinguished itself by scrupulous adherence to its international obligations. It stood by its agreements and treaties with other governments. The Western Powers came to trust Turkey on the grounds of its long-term record of good international behaviour. It showed itself to be reliable in the international arena and responsible of its foreign policy; it also had a good record of internal political stability. Foreign policy of Turkey was broadly based upon popular support and was cautious and pacific. Atatürk, in co-operation with a competent government, concentrated his efforts within the boundaries of his own country, modernised and developed it. Turkey's national energies were almost entirely devoted to 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.

In a truly statesmanlike manner, Atatürk repudiated adventurism and expansionism. Non-aggression was the cornerstone of the republic that he raised out of the debacle of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. As Atatürk many times declared, Turkey's foreign policy was peace, friendship and trade with all nations –which called for the use of all resources for internal development and the betterment of the citizen's life. Possibly the most important feature of Atatürk's thinking in matters of foreign policy was to define the national interest strictly in accordance with the country's own need for peace, development, stability and security rather than foreign adventurism. Turkey had no expansionist aims²⁰.

Turkey controlled the Straits; it also had a strong army and a growing navy. The Turkish army was considered by most observers to be far and away the best in the Balkans and Western Asia. Such military force as

¹⁹ See, for example, Dankwart Rustow in Roy Macridis (Ed.), *Foreign Policies in World Politics*, New Jersey, 1958, p. 302.

²⁰ Lorraine's Speech (1948).

Turkey did possess made it the most potent regional power, a major factor in the calculations of all its neighbours. The Turks had a great military tradition. Besides the practices of diplomacy, Atatürk used military demonstration to help achieve policy goals. Since military strength was the obvious measure of Turkey's power, its display served to impress others with that of Ankara's might. Thus, with its wise leadership and supported by a solid military organisation, Turkey acquired a status in the diplomatic arena which made it a factor of importance in world affairs, reaching far beyond the frontiers of the country.

Unbound by any ideological considerations, Turkey showed remarkable adaptation to the changing circumstances of international politics. Turkish diplomacy was so far-sighted and elastic as easily to embrace in friendship all states, possessed of whatsoever form of government, of whatsoever ideological ideas, that subscribed to the doctrine of peace. There were in the Balkans alone various kinds of governments, with varying degrees of autocracy and of democracy: Turkey was the trusted friend of them all. Equally with the Soviet Union and very different governments in the Middle East it was on terms of the utmost cordiality. It, perhaps as vividly as any country in the world, proved that where the ideal of peace was firmly and unswervingly preserved, no friendship was impossible. That was its theory, and that was its practice. Its success was to be judged by the fact that, whereas not much more than a decade ago it had what it considered potential enemies almost all round it, it now could count most of those states as its friends²¹.

The basic stance of Atatürk's diplomacy was clearly respectful of law. For the support of their claims, Turkish statesmen often referred to international law and to its main source, i.e. international agreements and treaties. After the Treaty of Lausanne was ratified on 6 August 1924, it became the international law basis to which Turkish government often referred. The Turkish leadership sincerely believed that international law must be observed.

Since the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, Turkey had been essentially a status quo power. The Turks had as great a stake in the preservation of peace as had any other status quo country. By the late

²¹ For a fuller discussion of this theme see the article by Roderic Davison, "The Turkish Republic: Fifty Years of Peace" in *World Affairs*, 136, 1973, pp. 164-180.

1920's Turkey had adopted the policy of what came to be described as "collective security". On 31 January 1929 it ratified the Briand-Kellogg Pact renouncing war as an instrument of national policy, thereby becoming the first country to do so after the United States. On 18 July 1932 Turkey joined the League of Nations and became a firm supporter of the principle of collective security against all aggression. Its prestige was high both in east and west. It assumed a full share in the League's activities, being elected to a semi-permanent seat on the council in 1934 with British, Balkan and Western Asian support. In international circles this was considered to be an excellent development. For Turkey was one of the most consistent advocates of a powerful and comprehensive League. Without damaging its friendship towards the Soviet Union, Turkey meant to keep open all ways leading to the West. As such, its delegation to Geneva could work with that of the Western Powers in addressing a familiar range of challenges to international peace and security. Foreign Minister Aras could inspire League attenders and League watchers with passionate speeches for peace.

For Turkey, the League of Nations was an omnibus big enough to reconcile the alliance with the Soviet Union, the Balkan Entente and the relationship being established with Britain and France. The League accomplished what would have been extremely difficult to achieve otherwise, and what Turkey in fact was forced to attempt in the years following the League's collapse. Article 16 of the Covenant of the League, if vigorously upheld, effectively consolidated all three principles of the Turkish foreign policy into one alliance. With the tools of traditional diplomacy, this might never be possible, and in the event the Turks were to find the attempt extremely difficult and fruitless. On 14 November 1935, Aras told Loraine, that the maintenance of peace in a regime of collective security assured by the integral maintenance of the Covenant of the League was the foundation of Atatürk's foreign policy²². On 4 November 1934, İnönü informed Loraine that he hoped that the League could be made a real and effective organism for collective security and an institution of benefit not merely to the few, but impartially to the many²³. Aras himself always insisted on two principles: absolute fidelity to the

²² F.O. 371/19039.E/6710/1213/44. Loraine (Ankara) to Hoare, 14 November 1935.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1011/61. Loraine (Ankara) to Hoare, 4 November 1934.

League and unquestioning discharge of the obligations imposed on Turkey; and that outside these obligations Turkey had no quarrel with any nation²⁴.

Turkey's entry into the League of Nations confirmed its peaceful intentions and its rapprochement to the status quo camp in Europe. The entry marked, in a sense, the end of Turkey's relative isolation from the international community and the beginning of new initiatives in foreign affairs. For a medium power Turkey took an active part in League affairs. It co-operated with League efforts to maintain collective security. It supported Republican Spain and recognised the full implications of Benito Mussolini's policy of regaining the Roman Empire for Italy. 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. Turkey was on good terms with almost every state represented at the Geneva Institution and Aras was an energetic figure in its halls. Turkey had a fine performance as a member of the League of Nations.

On the League of Nations, İnönü stated on 14 June 1937 at the Grand National Assembly as follows: "The strength and the weakness of the League has of late been greatly exaggerated. It is utopian to expect the League to settle great problems with ease; it is equally unrealistic to say that the League is of no utility. The reason for the League's present weakness is it is without help of the states which de facto and de jure remain outside it. The Turkish government is loyally and sincerely convinced that it is a useful organisation and intends to pursue a policy in accordance with its principles"²⁵. Atatürk, in his opening speech of the third session of the fifth Grand National Assembly on 1 November 1937, spoke of Turkey's deep attachment to the League of Nations, to which he gave credit for the satisfactory settlement of the Hatay question. He stated that during the difficult phase through which the League was passing the Turkish government, by manifesting its devotion, in all domains, to this international institution continued to follow the course which was most in conformity with the ideal of peace²⁶. Atatürk's support of the League

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ İnönü's Speeches (1946), p. 322. Speech of 14 June 1937.

²⁶ See text of Atatürk's speech, in "Speech Delivered by Kemal Atatürk, The President of the Turkish Republic at the Opening of the Grand National Assembly on 1 November 1937", Turkish Government Press, Broadcasting and Tourism Office Publication, Ankara, 1937, pp. 117-129.

accorded well with his Mazzinist approach to the question of nationality. "We must think of the whole mankind as being a single body and each nation as constituting a part of that body. We must not say, 'if there is a sickness in a certain place in the world, what does that matter to me?' If there is such sickness, we must be just as much concerned with it as though it happened right in our midst"²⁷.

Turkey through its support of the League and its participation in ententes and pacts had lent its support to the principle of collective security. Coming at a time when a series of unilateral treaty repudiations had seriously damaged the prestige of international law and all but undermined the League system, it proved that there was at least one Power which had not succumbed to the fascination of *fait accompli* and still retained a proper respect for its international agreements. Turkey's request on 10 April 1936 for revision of the Lausanne Straits Convention by negotiation had thus thrown its weight on the side of international law and peaceful change. In so doing, the reputation for following a consistent peace policy, as well as the moral prestige of having been the first Power to employ methods of peaceful change were secured. The Turkish government had given an admirable example to Europe by the legality and correctness of its policy and shown a spirit of wise and constructive statesmanship²⁸.

Through a number of clearing 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. Germany, in addition to sending more goods to Turkey than any other nation, was also Turkey's best customer. In 1938 Germany provided 47 percent of Turkish imports and took 42.9 percent of Turkish exports. Increasing numbers of Germans, Aryan and other, found official employment in Turkey as professors. Germany also supplied advisers and arms and German firms were active in the construction sector. Many Turkish administrators, trained in pre-1914 Germany, turned there as a matter of course for

²⁷ Patrick Balfour Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of a Nation*, London, 1964, p. 527. See also Esmer (1961), *passim*.

²⁸ *Hansard*, Commons Vol. CCCXV Col 1119-1123, Speech by Anthony Eden on 27 July 1936.

experts and equipment, not only for military purposes but also for the railroads, industrial plants, schools and agricultural projects. Students were encouraged to go to German universities and technical colleges. On the part of Berlin, the main reason for the close economic relations between the two countries was to be found in the area of German military economy. In the latter part of the 1930's more than half of the chrome ore essential to the German armaments industry came from Turkey. There was no substitute for Turkish chrome in the German armaments programme and thus the cultivation of good relations with Turkey was also necessary for Berlin. There was no question but that Germany was making every effort to win favour with the Turkish government. The special attention to Turkish military missions and to Turkish munition orders, the invitations to Turkish newspaper men and to students to make tours in Germany and above all the long-term credits, announced by Dr. Walter Funck, Minister of Economics on 6 October 1938, might be regarded as German attempts to that effect²⁹.

Turkey was anxious to come to an understanding with Italy and Atatürk made it plain that he always stood ready to conclude a security arrangement with Rome, but with the proviso that Turkey's complete independence was preserved. And since its Foreign Minister's visit to Milan on 3 February 1937 Turkey began to clear the areas of misunderstanding between itself and Italy. Relations between the two countries improved after the decision had been reached at the Balkan Conference on 25-27 February 1938 that Turkey and Greece should take the step, already taken by Yugoslavia and about to be taken by Romania, of accrediting their diplomatic representatives in Rome in a form involving recognition of Italy's African Empire. This was followed by Italy's accession to the Montreux Convention, which had set up a new regime for the Turkish Straits in place of that established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty.

At no time did the Turkish statesmen allow their championship of the Balkan Entente and Saadabad Pact to deter from creating good relations with the two countries – Germany and Italy – that were hostile to regional

²⁹ Documents on German Foreign Policy, D.V., 96/107717, No. 546, pp. 601-603, 5 July 1938. *Ibid.*, 2725/532791-95, No. 549, pp. 622-623, 16 August 1938. Moreover see M.A.E., Private Papers, René Massigli, PA-AP: 217, Massigli to M.A.E., 12 May 1939, Vol. 26, pp. 401-403.

blocks. By keeping their foreign policy flexible, the Turks found themselves by 1938 balanced between the rival interests of the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain. As Professor Mümtaz Soysal – one of the leading political scientists of Turkey – suggested, Atatürk understood the need for flexibility and so never based his action on rigid rules: "Throughout that period, Turkey's foreign policy was determined not by a party outlook based on a fundamental ideology or doctrine, but by the sound judgement and diplomatic virtuosity of the leadership"³⁰.

Turkey was not in bondage to any Power, politically or economically. The Treaty of Lausanne had given Turkey its political and economic independence and full advantage was taken of it. Indebted to none of the Great Powers, the Turks remained open to offers from all of them, a situation they utilised adroitly. The policy of peace and friendship with all Powers, of accepting assistance freely from all; but conserving a strict independence of action was pursued. Pacts, ententes and alliances would be maintained, but with the realism which had marked Turkish foreign policy throughout. Increased reliance would be placed on self-help. Turkish foreign policy-makers based their decisions on frank calculations of enlightened self-interest and they generally assumed that others would follow the same principle.

Turkish nation supported the foreign policies of its government in peace or when it considered itself to be threatened with imminent danger of war. The Turks were a more united and cohesive nation than any period in their history. High national morale in the interwar period permeated all activities of the Turkish nation, its agricultural and industrial production as well as its military establishment and diplomatic service. In the form of public opinion, high national morale provided an intangible factor without whose support the Turkish leadership would not have been able to pursue its policies with full effectiveness. High national morale had clearly positive effects on the existing military strength and the actual determination with which the governments pursued their foreign policies. Turkish governments were representative above all in the sense of being able to translate the inarticulate convictions and aspirations of the people into international objectives and policies and thus had the best

³⁰ Mümtaz Soysal, *Dış Politika ve Parlamento* (Foreign Policy and Parliament), Ankara, 1964, pp. 118-119.

chance to marshal the national energies in support of those objectives and policies.

The quality of Atatürk's foreign policy combined different factors into an integrated whole, gave them direction and weight and awakened their slumbering potentialities by giving them the breath of actual power. Turkey's interwar diplomacy of high calibre brought the ends and means of foreign policy into harmony with the available resources of national power. It tapped the hidden sources of national strength and transformed them fully and securely into political realities. By giving direction to the national effort, it in turn increased the independent weight of certain factors, such as military preparedness, national character and morale.

The World Powers paid more attention to Turkey in the interwar period than in the past. In a world of tumult and change, in an age when anchors of traditions were dragging in the tempest of events, and in a region where experimental regimes were hard put to maintain themselves, Turkey stood fast. Moreover, it grew perceptibly in wisdom, stature and dignity. This growth tended to strengthen and lend lustre to the Republican administration and to the man who created and inspired it, Atatürk. In their flexibility, their realism, in their firm pursuit of vital national interests, Turkish statesmen were second to none. Turkish statesmen were recognised as equal to the best European political leaders who began competing with one another in an effort to find favour in the eyes of Atatürk. The Turkish President made very clear to all parties the peaceful propositions on which the foreign policy of his country was founded. These were encapsulated in his famous dictum "peace at home, peace in the world". The principles and approach adopted by the Turkish leader in that segment of history provide a lasting and valuable lesson for the diplomats of today.