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The Graeco-Turkish Relationship, 1930-1941*

The worthy article of Lt. Col. Michael N. Schmitt (USAF) in the *Naval War College Review* (Summer 1996), appropriately titled “Aegean Angst: The Greek-Turkish Dispute”, prompted me to complete my study of the Graeco-Turkish relationship between 1930 and 1941 —a period reflecting an exception to the seemingly endless “anomosity” between the two nations. During the 1930-41 period, the statesmen of Greece and Turkey forged a record of understanding and friendship well worth our attention. They placed the security, honor and welfare of their

* I offer this study for peace in memory of my mother, Jasmine Gillas Bitzes; my uncle Demetrius N. Gillas; and Professor Clarence Lowe of the University of Nebraska (Lincoln), who did much to light the way for me to research, write and present this effort.

The reader will note that a lengthy bibliography does not accompany this study. Actually, much collateral reading was necessary, however, to determine whether or not such a thesis topic had been explored in the past. On Dr. Robin Higham’s suggestion, Professor Calvin Christman of Cedar Valley College was consulted. He agreed with what my research had revealed; it is a study heretofore not attempted. In the final analysis, the study had to be based almost totally on archival and published documents available to the researcher (the Italian and Greek translations are the author’s).

Besides the materials cited in the notes, however, there are some very good secondary sources relating to this study. Recommended are: Gerasimos Augustinos, *The Greeks of Asia Minor* (1992); Evangelos Averoff-Tossiza, *By Fire and Axe* (1978); Ralph Bennett, *Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy* (1989); Clement Henry Dodd, *The Crisis of Turkish Democracy* (1983); Nuri Eren, *Turkey Today and Tomorrow* (1963); Turhan Feyzioğlu, Editor, *Atatürk’s Way* (1982); Halidé Edib, “Turkey and Her Allies”, *Foreign Affairs* (Apr. 1940); Lord J. P. Kincross, *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk* (1965); Boddy John Macris, “John Metaxas and the “Epic” of 1940” (unpublished thesis, Wright State University, 1973); John T. Malakasses, “The Foreign Policy of the Metaxas Regime vis-à-vis London on the Eve of the Greco-Italian War” (pamphlet, 1977); Norman J. G. Pounds, *Europe and the Mediterranean* (1953); Richard D. Robinson, *The First Turkish Republic* (1963); Metin Tamkoç, *The Warrior Diplomats* (1976); Ercument Tokmak, “Atatürk’s Strategic Approach to the Modernization of Turkey” (unpublished manuscript, Maxwell Air Force Base, 1988); and Vamik D. Volkan and Norman Itzkowitz, *The Immortal Atatürk - A Psychobiography* (1984).

peoples above all other considerations in their belief that the future belonged to the nonaggressive policies of the West. Furthermore, they held their course and did the best they could with what they had against aggression and foreign intervention.

It began on 10 February 1930 when Greece's Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos stood before the Greek Chamber of Deputies to announce the death of the "Megali Idea" of Greek expansionism and the beginning of a policy of peace and reconciliation with Greece's neighbors¹. Accepting the dictates of geography and seeing a need for restoring Greece's international position which had reached its nadir with his nation's tragic defeat in the Graeco-Turkish War (1921-1922), Venizelos hosted the First Balkan Conference in Athens. Lasting a week (5-12 October 1930), it was attended by representatives of all the Balkan states. The Conference moved to develop grounds for a regional community of interest based on the realities of geography and the need for economic and diplomatic cooperation in the interest of peace.

The success of the Conference encouraged Venizelos to travel to Ankara with the hope of settling outstanding questions concerning Greece and Turkey. The outgrowth was the Treaty of Ankara of 30 October 1930, which recognized the territorial *status quo*, accepted naval equality in the eastern Mediterranean and finalized an earlier agreement on minority claims resulting from population exchanges.

From this juncture, the leaders of the two countries, namely presidents Kemal Atatürk (1923-1938) and Ismet İnönü (1938-1950) of Turkey and prime ministers Eleftherios Venizelos (1910-1915, 1916-1920, 1928-1932, 1933) and John Metaxas (1936-1941) of Greece, began to forge a friendship that survived some of the most critical points of World War II, especially between 1936 and 1941.

The objective of this study is to show how these leaders responded to the principal crises of their times as they related to the general European course of events. Specifically, this paper examines the Ethiopian Crisis, the Albanian Crisis, the Anglo-French-Turkish Pact, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the defeat of France, the Graeco-Italian War, German armed intervention in the Balkans and finally the German-Turkish Friendship and

1. Panayotis Pipinelis, "The Greco-Turkish Feud Revived", *Foreign Affairs* (Jan. 1959), pp. 306-316. Mr. Pipinelis was a Greek career diplomat.

Non-Aggression Pact of 18 June 1941.

By November 1931, Turkey's President Atatürk felt he could state before his Grand National Assembly:

"The supreme interests of Turkey and Greece no longer oppose each other. It is correct that our two countries should find their security and force in a sincere mutual friendship"².

It followed that in 1934, the purposeful yearly Balkan Conferences and the general European political climate moved the Balkan states to think in terms of a more binding and effective Balkan Pact. The result was the more formal and structured Balkan Entente system, which included Greece, Rumania, Turkey and Yugoslavia. Bulgaria and Albania, influenced by the revisionist movement led by Hitler and Mussolini, refused to sign the Pact of 9 February 1934. The Bulgarian position rooted in the Treaty of Neuilly (1919), in particular, led to the Ten-year Graeco-Turkish Non-Aggression Pact of 14 September 1934. Metaxas efforts to give the Balkan Pact an effective military dimension for the mutual defense of its signatories, however, never bore fruit.

Nevertheless, the beginnings of the Entente were auspicious. First, it joined the League in a united front against Fascist Italy's aggression in Ethiopia (1935-1936). The Ethiopian crisis led the Entente to support Turkey's request to modify the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. The ensuing Montreux Convention of 20 July 1936 gave Turkey the right to refortify the Dardanelles, significantly changing the disposition of the *Afro-Eurasian Triangle* (See map.).

The cultural, historic and geostrategic Afro-Eurasian Triangle, with its angles resting on Egypt, Greece and Turkey, has been coveted by conquerors antedating Alexander the Great, who was the first to appreciate its cultural significance as it related to humankind. Russia's Peter the Great by the Treaty of Constantinople of 1700 set the stage for Russian interest in the Dardanelles Straits. Control of the Straits and their hinterlands would make Russia a Mediterranean power and the Black Sea a Russian lake. However, Russian ambitions did not go unchallenged. Since the turn of the Nineteenth Century, Anglo-French strategy in the

2. Ferenc A. Vali, *Bridge Across the Bosphorus* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 219.

Mediterranean Basin focused on controlling the Triangle. Under Mussolini, however, Rome needed it to fulfill her dream of *Mare Nostrum*.

The foregoing geostrategic and historical facts and the European political climate in 1938 caused the Entente to move toward drawing Bulgaria into the fold. Consequently, as president of the Entente's Council, Metaxas signed a Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression in Sofia on 31 July 1938. The Treaty recognized Bulgaria's right to rearm³. At once, Bulgaria accepted a ten-million pound Anglo-French loan. This attempt to wean Bulgaria from Germany was quickly cited by Hitler as part of the Anglo-French scheme to "encircle Germany"⁴. Bulgaria was never to join the Entente and thus seriously hampered any chance for a Balkan military alliance against an outside aggressor⁵.

Ergo, the contest for the Balkans had surfaced. Understandably, the Anglo-French bloc saw the German economic and political position in the Balkans as a threat to the Triangle, especially the southern angle, which included the Suez Canal, the pivot of the British Empire⁶.

By mid-1939, the Versailles Order of 1919 was a shambles. The Rome-Berlin Axis (27 October 1936), the German annexation of Austria (13 March 1938), the Munich Agreement (29 September 1938), the German absorption of the rest of Czechoslovakia (16 March 1939) and finally the ominous Pact of Steel (22 May 1939) between Hitler and Mussolini had divided Europe as the Ethiopian Crisis had crippled the League of Nations. It followed that Europe's "Small Powers" set off scrambling to protect their interests and trying to chose the "winning side". A frantic pattern of geopolitical and psychological maneuvering began to emerge creating an almost chaotic atmosphere, of which the

3. This was merely an affirmation of the fact that Bulgaria had been rearming secretly with German arms for at least four years; see *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933-1947*, J. O. Iatrides, Ed., MacVeagh to Roosevelt (22 Aug. 1938), (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), pp. 135-138.

4. *Documents of German Foreign Policy* (cited hereafter as *DGFP*), (Washington, D.C.: U.S. State Department, 1956), S-D, IV 247, Chamberlain-Hitler colloquy, Munich (30 Sep. 1938).

5. The idea of a strong Balkan defensive alliance in one form or another continued to be encouraged by London up to 6 April 1941. Athens and Ankara were always part of a plan; but they were not always willing, usually for good reasons.

6. Great Britain, *Foreign Office Archives* (cited hereafter as *BFOA*), (H.M. Public Records Office, London) R7505/7505, FO to Palaret (22 Sep. 1940).

Great Powers tried to take full advantage.

The Graeco-Turkish relationship, however, was noticeably different. On 4 April 1938, what had come to be considered “the closest alliance in the Near East” was “drawn even tighter”, when Greece and Turkey signed a “Supplementary Agreement” to the Treaty of Ankara of 1930. The Agreement related to defense in case of war in the Balkans⁷. Also, both nations agreed to continue consulting each other “on international questions of common interest in order to secure a line of action” true to their friendship, cooperation and understanding⁸.

Worth noting is that on 25 May 1937, Atatürk had sent two messages to Athens through İsmet İnönü regarding Graeco-Turkish friendship. Metaxas responded appropriately. However, Atatürk’s third, “historic” message, best describes the feelings of both men:

I am happy to let you know that it gives me great pleasure as a man and a soldier that our frontiers are the same and that the forces which defend them are one and inseparable⁹.

Atatürk’s words are subject to interpretation; however, history should record that both men had the highest respect for one another as soldier-statesmen. Metaxas had risen from captain to Deputy Chief of Staff of the Hellenic Army during the Balkan Wars and was “generally regarded as a brilliant staff officer”. At Gallipoli in 1915, Atatürk’s astuteness and leadership earned him the title *Gazi* for defeating the British forces bent on seizing the Dardanelles. Very important was that Metaxas had strongly opposed the Allied plan for Gallipoli and Greece’s invasion of Turkey (1921-1922), both of which he considered to be acts of folly courting disaster. He was right. Both he and Atatürk had tasted victory and defeat; both had seen men die. Both men were descendants of proud and ancient civilizations, the Greek and the Hittite. Both led “authoritative regimes” —Atatürk wishing to create a Turkish nation, Metaxas, a Third Greek Civilization; but, above all, both wanted to free their nations of foreign interference and exploitation.

7. MacVeagh, p. 133.

8. Türkaya Ataöv, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1939-1945* (Ankara: Ankara UP, 1965), p. 7.

9. John Metaxas, P. Vranas, Editor, *His Personal Diary*, IV-1 (Athens: Gnovosti, 1951-1954), p. 275. İnönü was Metaxas’ guest at the time.

Gazi Mustapha Kemal Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey, died on 10 November 1938. Metaxas left his sick bed to attend the funeral and confer with İsmet İnönü, the President's successor. İnönü was a war hero, diplomat and statesman in his own right and had been prime minister since he was elected in 1923¹⁰. Metaxas returned to Athens relieved and perhaps even enthused. He recorded in his diary, "We agree on everything", which included Bulgarian revisionism and the Entente¹¹.

Taking Mussolini's *Mare Nostrum* ambitions seriously, Metaxas sought an alliance with Britain late in 1938. But the British minister in Athens answered that such an alliance "was hardly in the realm of practical politics"¹². Instead of treating Greece and Turkey as two vital and inseparable corners of the Afro-Eurasian Triangle, London attached the "highest importance to the military advantages to be derived from having Turkey and Greece ... allies in a war against Germany and Italy", but an alliance with Greece must be avoided for fear of alienating Italy until at least Italy shows her hand by seizing "Albania either by force or by cunning"¹³. The Anglo-French policy of wooing Italy was to continue after Italy's occupation of Albania (7 April 1939)¹⁴ and to last up to a few days before Italy declared war on the Allies on 10 June 1940. France fell ten days later.

The day after Albania became a part of Mussolini's empire, the Allies decided to give Greece a "guarantee" against aggression, so they extended the pledge made to the Poles on 31 March 1939, to both Greece and Rumania on 13 April 1939. On the 10th, Turkish Foreign

10. İnönü served as president until 1950 and was the hero of the Battle of İnönü in the Graeco-Turkish War (1921-22), while serving as Atatürk's chief of staff. He died in 1973. Professor Peter F. Drucker writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* (Apr. 1944, p. 466) noted in his article, "Turkey and the Balance of Power" that history has virtually ignored this great man.

11. Metaxas, p. 314. Metaxas, like İnönü, worked to break the economic stranglehold the Germans had on his country.

12. BFOA, R886/886/19, "Annual Report on Greece, 1938" (31 Jan. 1939), p. 14.

13. *Ibid.*, R2667/31/19 (13 Mar. 1939). The U.S. Ambassador to Paris, C. William Bullitt, reported to Roosevelt that the Turks would go to war if Italy attacked Yugoslavia. "The British however ... would be immovably opposed to a declaration of war on Italy even though Italy should invade Yugoslavia". – United States, *State Department Archives*, (cited hereafter as *USSDA*) 740.0011, EW 1939/2598 (1 May 1940). Also, the British felt the same way if the Greeks decided to go to the aid of Yugoslavia if Italy attacked that country. – BFOA, R6139/2469/19, FO to Palairat (20 May 1940).

14. *Ibid.*, R6198/438/22 (26 May 1939).

Minister Sükrü Saraçoğlu in a colloquy with the British Ambassador, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, expressed disappointment with the weak way the Anglo-French had handled the Albanian Crisis¹⁵. Nevertheless, this episode caused the Anglo-French-Turkish Pact negotiations to be concluded quickly on 23 May 1939. It then awaited ratification. Definitely aimed at possible Italian aggression, the Pact provided for mutual assistance, including military, in the "Mediterranean area" in case of war and for the transfer of Alexandretta from France to Turkey. As early as March 1939, when negotiations had begun, Berlin had informed the Turks that the news was "extremely displeasing" and "sharply contradicted" Turkey's repeated assurance to "pursue a policy of strict neutrality towards all the Great Powers"¹⁶. Saraçoğlu made it clear to Rome and Berlin that the Pact was purely defensive and cited the manifestation of Axis territorial ambitions in Albania and Czechoslovakia¹⁷.

The Greek response to the Italian coup in Albania was mobilization to ward off a possible Italian attack or occupation of Corfu. The news of the Allied guarantees brought a sigh of relief in Athens. Nevertheless, to this day, there are those Greeks who harbor a deep resentment for the way the Great Powers, especially the Allies, treated Greece during this period¹⁸.

Meanwhile, Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano was flaunting Fascism's new role in the Balkans by assuring the Bulgars of assistance for achieving their military and territorial ambitions¹⁹ (Bulgaria's revisionism called for access to the Aegean at Greece's expense.). And why not? British Ambassador Sir Percy Loraine was in Rome assuring

15. *Ibid.*, R2549/1877/19 (10 Apr. 1939).

16. *DGFP*, S-D, VII, 59 (21 Mar. 1939). Later in May, the German ambassador to Turkey, von Papen, admitted failing to forestall the Pact and blamed Italy's move into Albania for his failure. – *Ibid.*, 336 (6 May 1939).

17. Italy, *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (cited hereafter as *DDI*), S-8, XII, Saracoğlu-De Peppo colloquy. See also *DGFP*, S-D, VI, 315 (3 May 1939) and Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Hugessen (British ambassador to Turkey), *Diplomat in Peace and War* (London: John Murray, 1949), p. 145. According to von Papen, Atatürk had forewarned his successors of Italian ambitions regarding the Dardanelles. – Franz von Papen, *Memoirs*, Brian Connell, Trans. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1953), pp. 444-445.

18. Metaxas, IV-1, "Fovera Apofasis Mou, 1939", pp. 322-338. It should be noted that the Allied guarantee did not go unnoticed by the Axis, which meant pressure. See *DGFP*, S-D, VI 231 (19 Apr. 1939).

19. *DDI*, S-8, XII, 60 (30 May 1939).

Ciano that Britain still honored the Anglo-Italian Pact (16 November 1938)²⁰, which Mussolini had so blatantly violated in Albania.

At the same time, Rumania and Yugoslavia were complaining that the Turks had crippled the Entente by agreeing to the Tripartite Pact; yet Italian Ambassador Ottavio De Peppo in Ankara was reporting with glee that Rumania and Yugoslavia had done irreparable damage to the Entente leaving only Greece and Turkey, who seemed to distrust each other²¹. To Rome's dismay, by the end of June, Metaxas and the Greek press were clearly anti-Italian and reacting to the Anglo-French-Turkish Pact with "felitious words". When Count Emmanuel Grazzi, Italy's minister in Athens, complained, Nikolaos Mavroudis, Metaxas' deputy minister for foreign affairs, answered that Turkey and Greece were "friends and allies"²². In June, the German ambassador to Turkey, Franz von Papen, reported that Turkey was ready to go to war with Italy if any conflict came to the Mediterranean or if Italy attacked Greece²³. Thus, the Axis made a persistent effort to drive a wedge between Athens and Ankara or to neutralize them²⁴.

Nevertheless, in July 1939, the Triangle remained intact in spite of Great Power policies and pressures and of a strong British distrust for John Metaxas, who after all was a Fascist dictator²⁵. Although London took a kinder attitude toward Metaxas after the Albanian crisis by recalling its minister to Greece, the unfriendly Sir Sydney Waterlow (see note 25), the assistance afforded Greece was very little. That month, London extended Greece a credit of two-million pounds after some "distasteful haggling". To be fair, the military and economic resources

20. *Ibid.*, 159 (8 Jun. 1939); see also David Britton Funderburk, "Nadir of Appeasement: British Policy and the Demise of Albania, April 7, 1939", *Balkan Studies*, XI, (Oct. 1970), pp. 299-304.

21. *DDI*, S-8, XII, 206 (12 Jan. 1939). See also 517 (9 Jul.); Knatchbull-Hugessen, p. 158; and Ataöv, who determined that Yugoslavia was acting so for fear of the Axis, p. 32.

22. *DDI*, S-8, XII, 512 (8 Jul. 1939); see also 311 (22 Jun.) and 422 (1 Jul.).

23. *DGFP*, S-D, VI, 556 (22 Jun. 1939).

24. *Ibid.*, S-D, VI, 259 (25 Apr. 1939) and *DDI*, S-8, XII, 262 (17 Jun.) and 490 (6 Jul.).

25. Waterlow was largely responsible for London's feelings toward Metaxas, who knew Waterlow was no friend of his. Metaxas' stand during the Albanian Crisis caused London to replace its minister with the more professional Sir. C. Michael Palaiet in early June with the title of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary.

available to the British for friends and allies were highly limited, especially during the 1939-1941 period. This was particularly true in the eastern Mediterranean. For strategic considerations, Greece came in third on London's priority list. Egypt was first, Turkey second²⁶.

If in mid-1939, the Graeco-Turkish relationship stood well, shortly, there were to be events beyond the control of Ankara and Athens, which were to effect changes in their future. Most important was the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 23 August 1939, which shook every capital in the world, especially Rome²⁷. The "Moscow balance" was gone. The Pact essentially gave Hitler a free hand in western Europe and Stalin in eastern. Immediately, the Allies and the Vatican began urging Mussolini to save Europe's peace again with another Munich²⁸. Mussolini did his best (see note 27) but to no avail.

Assuming Italy would go to war on the side of Germany and given the activities of the Italian army and air force in Albania, Greece informed Italy of her decision to mobilize ostensibly to defend herself against Bulgaria and pledged neutrality if war came to the Mediterranean²⁹. Also, Athens assured Rome that there was no agreement between Greece and Turkey that tied Greece to Turkey in the event of such a conflict³⁰.

Although the Axis expected the Turks to withdraw from the Allied camp and at least take a position of neutrality³¹, instead, Turkey informed Moscow on about 17 September that a Turkish-Soviet mutual assistance pact was in order³². Saracoğlu arrived in Moscow on the 27th.

26. BFOA, R7953/7505/19, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee (21 Oct. 1940) and R7953/7505/19, Palairé to London (18 Oct.).

27. It should be noted that eight days after Hitler and Mussolini signed the Pact of Steel (22 May 1939), Hitler began escalating his anti-Polish propaganda, while his partner was desperately trying to prevent Germany from going to war; because Italy was four years away from being prepared. Italy's war machine was suffering from a serious case of "obsolescence". See DDI, S-8, XII, 59, Mussolini to Hitler "The Cavallero Memorandum" (30 May 1939) and XIII, 1 and 4 (12 Aug.).

28. *Ibid.*, 205, Lorraine to Ciano (24 Aug. 1939) and 270 (25 Aug.).

29. Alexander Papagos, Field Marshal, *The Battle of Greece, 1940-1941*, Pat. Eliascos, Trans. (Athens: J. M. Scazakis, 1949), pp. 97-99.

30. DDI, S-8, XIII, 247 (25 Aug. 1939); and Metaxas, "Memorandum", IV-1 (21 Aug. 1939), pp. 386-389.

31. DGFP, S-D, VII, Mussolini to Hitler (25 Aug. 1939); 393 von Papen-Saracoğlu colloquy (28 Aug.) and VIII, 28, von Papen to Berlin (8 Sep.).

32. *Ibid.*, 81, Schulenberg (German Ambassador, Moscow) – Stalin colloquy (17 Sep.

Shortly after the Turkish démarche in Moscow, Hitler's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in Berlin (5 October 1939) was warning the new Turkish ambassador against Turkey ratifying the Allied Tripartite Pact³³. Meanwhile, Stalin kept Saraçoğlu in Moscow waiting for an answer while Europe went to war (3 September 1939) and Germany and the Soviet Union conquered and divided Poland in the four weeks ending 29 September. Events, the German attitude, the treatment of Saraçoğlu, and the Soviet demands concerning the Black Sea and the Dardanelles straits moved the Turkish Grand National Assembly to ratify unanimously the Allied Tripartite Pact on 9 November 1939³⁴. The ominous question, however, remained, Was Turkey to become another Poland? In the meantime, Metaxas was anxiously awaiting the outcome of Saraçoğlu's efforts in Moscow and was pleased with the outcome³⁵. That is, there was to be no surrender of any Turkish sovereignty regarding the Dardanelles to the Soviets.

Italy's position vis-à-vis German-Soviet alliance seemed to assure peace in the Balkans and Mediterranean. There was even talk of a neutral Balkan Entente bloc or one under the aegis of Italy. Although the meeting of the Permanent Council of the Balkan Entente in Belgrade in February 1940 caused a considerable amount of speculation indicating the Entente had taken definitive steps toward a united front in case of aggression against any member, a comparative study of the available documents indicated an impotence and divisiveness³⁶. Simultaneously, General Maxime Weygand, Commander of the French Forces, Middle East, was trying to put together a force for a Balkan front in the event the western front fortifications (particularly the Maginot Line) produced a stalemate. To further confuse matters, after the Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939, Italy was secretly supplying the brave Finns with war matériel through Germany to the dismay of both Berlin

1939).

33. *Ibid.*, 202 (5 Oct. 1939).

34. DDI, S-8, XIII, 345 (27 Aug. 1939), 370 and 385 (28 Aug.) and the quoted article by Yunus Nadi in the official Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* (27 Aug.).

35. Metaxas, IV-1, p. 399. Metaxas seriously believed the possibility of Turkey deserting the Allied camp. See *ibid.*, p. 401.

36. USSDA, 770.00/978 GRR (16 Feb. 1940), B (21 Feb.) and B (28 Feb.); and BFOA, R5718/191/92 (3 May).

and Moscow³⁷.

Secretly, however, the picture was quite different. The day the Allies declared war on Germany, instructions went out to all German legations that there was to be no criticism of Italy's decision to stay out of the war and that such "criticism" would be "severely punished"³⁸. Also Mussolini had been delivering on his promise to Hitler to assist Berlin with intelligence, propaganda and the shifting of forces to keep the Allies pinned down and guessing³⁹. This possibly explains why Metaxas' démarche in Rome for a Graeco-Italian rapprochement was for all practical purposes rebuffed and why De Peppo made no attempt at bettering Italo-Turkish relations in spite of von Papen's pressure to do so⁴⁰.

Thus, from September 1939, the so-called "Phoney War" continued to be fought on the psychological, diplomatic and economic levels until the Spring of 1940, when Hitler unleashed his blitzkrieg into Scandinavia, the Low Countries and France. The force of the German juggernaut was virtually irresistible and unbelievably successful. So much so that Italy declared war on the Allies on 10 June. The Germans were in Paris the 13th. By the 24th, France had signed armistice agreements with both Axis partners; and by 8 August, Britain was under the most intense aerial siege in history. Meanwhile, the Turks had refused to go to war at the side of the Allies by invoking Protocol 2 of the Tripartite Pact, which provided that Turkey was not obligated to go to war if it meant provoking a Soviet attack⁴¹. Turkey could not sustain a two-front war with two partners who had already virtually lost the war. Later, von Papen wrote in his *Memoirs*: "The magnificent soldiers of the Turkish army completely lacked modern technical weapons, tanks, and above all, a suitable air force"⁴². To add to these weaknesses of Turkish arms,

37. *DDI*, S-9, II, 534 (9 Dec. 1939), 567 (12 Dec.) 579 and 582 (13 Dec.); see also *DGFP*, S-D, VIII, 435 (10 Dec.) and 438 (11 Dec.).

38. *Ibid.*, S-D, VII, 559 (2 Sep. 1939). For instance, the Turks "knew that anyone dealing with Italy was also dealing with Germany". – Ataöv, p. 38.

39. *DDI*, S-8, XIII, 329 and 341 (27 Aug. 1939); and *DGFP*, S-D, VIII, 38 (9 Sep.) and 176 (2 Oct.).

40. *Ibid.*, 28, von Papen to Berlin (8 Sep. 1939).

41. *DDI*, S-9, V, 20 (14 Jun. 1940) and *DGFP*, S-D, IX, 345 (14 Jun.). *BFOA*, WO 201/1076 X/J 8045, "Translation of the Treaty between France, Great Britain and Turkey –signed in Ankara on 19 Oct. 1939".

42. von Papen, p. 461.

the Germans had reneged on armament orders already paid for by the Turks; and the Allies had none to spare⁴³.

On 13 May, Metaxas recorded in his diary: "Our position is difficult, the Anglo-French have forsaken us, the Turks and the others where war materièl is concerned whereas the Germans supply Bulgaria"⁴⁴. (In January 1940, Ankara had accepted a forty-million pound loan and gold credit from the Allies, who had little or nothing to sell.)⁴⁵.

The day after Italy declared war on the Allies, Metaxas assured Grazzi of Greece's neutrality. Metaxas' main concern was Turkey. If Ankara decided to go to war on the side of the Allies, war surely would come to the Balkans. He was relieved to hear of Turkey's decision⁴⁶, but Greece's ordeal was just about to begin —the agony was to last nine bloody and devastating years in war against fascism and then communism (1940-1949). On 20 June, Metaxas recorded, "The tragedy of our geographical position. Will the Bulgarians attack? Will the Cretans betray us and go over to the British? Will the Germans sacrifice us to the Bulgarians?"⁴⁷.

It is obvious, however, that Metaxas knew that sooner or later Greece would have to deal with an Italy bent on restoring the Roman Empire.

The Graeco-Turkish relationship had not endeared itself to the victorious Axis partners or to the Soviets. For instance, on 17 June 1940, three days after Paris fell, De Peppo in Ankara reported to Rome:

One of the most deceitful enemies that Italy, in particular, and the Axis, in general, have in Turkey is the Greek Ambassador Mr. Raffaele Raphael. Closely tied to Saraçoğlu, with whom he has a mutual aversion toward the totalitarian regimes, he and

43. Ataöv, pp. 40-50 and 74-75.

44. Metaxas, IV-2, p. 468. Metaxas' request on 18 May 1940 for an Anglo-Greek Alliance was turned down by London primarily because "Mussolini may resent such an alliance". — *BFOA*, R6139/2469/19, "War Cabinet: The Question of an Alliance with Greece" (21 May 1940).

45. *Ibid.*, R6510/316/44, Halifax to Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen (11 Jun. 1940).

46. Metaxas, IV-2, p. 475 and *DDI*, S-9, V, 3 (11 Jun. 1940).

47. Metaxas, p. 477. Metaxas expressed his concerns to a sympathetic Palairot, who tried, but failed, to move London to appreciate Greece's position. See *BFOA*, R7953/7505/19, Palairot to London (17 Oct. 1940).

his functionaries of his embassy conduct themselves here like true and proper agents of the so-called democratic powers.

Describing Raphael as “a loyal follower and interpreter” of John Metaxas, De Peppo asked Rome to have Athens recall him⁴⁸. Monsieur Raphael stayed in Ankara.

Between June 1940 and 28 October 1940, there is no question that Mussolini tried to goad Greece into war or submission. This prompted Greece to turn to Germany for support, but Berlin merely referred the Greeks back to Rome. First, in July, the Italian air force attacked Greek warships in their home waters, and then, the Germans sponsored a group of pro-German Greek officers who tried to overthrow General, later Field Marshal, Alexander Papagos, the Greek Chief of the General Staff, who was considered too pro-Allied. They failed. The most dastardly and loathsome Fascist act was when on 15 August an Italian submarine without warning torpedoed and sank the pride of the Greek Royal Navy, the minelaying destroyer *Helle*, while she was taking part in the great feast of the Greek Orthodox Church, The Repose of the Mother of God, being celebrated on the island of Tinos.

Before attacking Greece on 28 October 1940, Italy tried to get Bulgaria to attack the Greeks simultaneously. Bulgaria’s main excuse for refusing was the Turkish Army poised in eastern Thrace⁴⁹. When finally Mussolini ordered the attack, Greece first shocked the world by stopping the invader and then driving him back into Albania. The desecration of the Shrine of the Mother of God, comparable to Lourdes of France, and the sinking of the *Helle* had united the Greek people at home and abroad as never before in modern history⁵⁰. Their men fought as their forebears did at the Marathon and Thermopylae.

48. DDI, S-9, V, 39 (17 Jun. 1940) and 116 (27 Jun.). Rome received a half-hearted apology from Athens.

49. According to Knatchbull-Hugessen, soon after the Italian attack on Greece, Ankara assured Athens that Greece could “safely withdraw” her forces from the Turkish frontier and that Turkey was “prepared to contain Bulgaria”. p. 168. See also Hellenic Foreign Ministry, *Hellenic Diplomatic Documents, 1940-1941* (Athens, 1980), Athens to London, 15 (3 Nov. 1940) and Ataöv, pp. 81-82.

50. The best short account (four pages) of the Greek feat in the English language comes in a letter from Sir Michael Palairet to Lord Halifax dated 9 November 1940, – BFOA, R8715/764/19.

To the Triumvirate of George II, King of the Hellenes, John Metaxas and General Alexander Papagos must go the credit for preparing and then leading the people to victory. John Metaxas, however, was spared the tragedy of defeat that came with German intervention on 6 April 1941. He had died on 29 January⁵¹. Unfortunately, Metaxas' successor, a kind and compassionate Alexander Korizis, was neither a Metaxas or an İnönü. Consequently, the last days of the Metaxas regime were understandably almost chaotic. By 30 May 1941, the Greek mainland and islands were in German hands.

For Turkey, Italy's attack on Greece gave reality to "Atatürk's political testament". The shock to the Turks was immense⁵². During the Italo-Greek War, Turkey felt that her intervention would trigger an attack by Bulgaria and Germany on the one end and the Soviet Union on the other. Meanwhile, however, Turkey as well as Yugoslavia secretly assisted the Greeks with arms and foodstuffs. The pressures on Ankara from Rome, Berlin and Moscow are well-recorded⁵³. Although Ankara tried to placate Hitler, Ribbentrop was furious with the Turkish press that continued to be anti-German⁵⁴. On 12 March, President İnönü wrote Hitler that since World War I Turkey's goal had been to survive and develop without outside interference. Turkey, under the present circumstances, he wrote, wished to remain neutral and would fight any invader, including the Germans⁵⁵. At the same time, Prime Minister Korizis let Berlin know that Greece wanted to prevent German intervention if the Greeks could have peace with "honor" in Albania⁵⁶. Hitler refused, because he felt that the Greeks would collapse under Mussolini's March Offensive, which was under way.

51. In a message to London, Palairret noted that "no future events can ever obscure the honour due to General Metaxas for the wisdom and prudence with which he prepared for the danger,...".

52. von Papen, p. 465.

53. *DGFP*, S-D, XII, 5 (1 Feb. 1941); 7 (3 Feb.); 113, Hitler to İnönü (1 Mar.); 122 (4 Mar.), 231 (28 Mar.). See also von Papen, pp. 470-472 and Ataöv, pp. 64-65.

54. *DGFP*, S-D, XII, 142 (9 Mar. 1941). According to Ataöv, p. 92, Greece's defeat left Turkey all but alone; yet the Turkish press continued to hail the Greek feat.

55. *DGFP*, S-D, XII, 161, İnönü to Hitler (12 Mar. 1941).

56. *Ibid.*, 170 (16 Mar. 1941).

The most persistent and frustrating pressure on Ankara, however, came from her ally, Britain. The intensity of the pressure is best felt when one reads the 128-page minutes of the First Ankara Conference (15-20 January 1941) between the British Liaison Staff and members of the Turkish General Staff. Chaired by General Asim Gunduz, Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff, the proceedings reflected Turkey's determination not to sacrifice her people in what seemed to be the inevitable defeat for the Graeco-British forces in the Balkans⁵⁷. The pressure intensified when Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary, met with the Turks in Ankara on 27 February 1941. After noting that Hitler had marshalled a force of 23 divisions and about 450 aircraft in Rumania for his assault on Greece, Eden stated that Britain was ready to send to Greece a force of 100.000 men, including four divisions, and air power. For the Turks the forces the British offered were inadequate for stopping the Germans; and again they refused to go to war⁵⁸.

Both Berlin and Rome, and very likely London, seemed certain that Mussolini's well-prepared March Offensive would finally crush the Greeks. But, they held after an heroic and bloody fight. German intervention was now inevitable. Hitler had to secure his right flank before his attack on the Soviet Union. Having to commit themselves to aiding the Greeks against the Germans for political reasons, the British sent a force wholly inadequate for stopping the Italo-German assault on Greece. The greatest disappointment came when even with extra-ordinary advantages, including *Ultra*, the British and Greek defenders were not able to hold Crete against the historic German airborne assault in May.

For all practical purposes, the continental struggle for the domination of the Afro-Eurasian Triangle ended with the neutralization of Turkey and the Axis conquest of Greece by 30 May 1941. The formal neutralization of Turkey came with the German-Turkish Friendship and Non-Aggression Pact of 18 June 1941. On 25 June Saraçoğlu stood before Turkish National Assembly and defended the Pact as "a pillar of

57. BFOA, WO 201/1073 X/J 8045, "First Ankara Conference (January 1941)".

58. *Ibid.*, WO 20/50, X/J 2490, "Anglo-Turkish Conversations, Ankara (27 February 1941)". The Turks apparently knew that Eden was stretching his figures. – See *DGFP*, S-D, XII, 67, von Papen to Berlin (20 Feb. 1941). The German ambassador reported that Saraçoğlu told him that "at most" the British had "three reserve divisions available in Egypt". See also Ataöv, pp. 87-92.

peace amid storms and destruction of war". The Pact, he said, did not abrogate Turkey's earlier agreements with the Anglo-French. Moreover, he continued, the Pact's beneficiaries were not only the peoples of Germany and Turkey but humankind as well⁵⁹.

Until Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 and while at the nadir of her World War II experience, Britain alone desperately and undauntedly held on at home and in Egypt. The fate of the Axis took an abrupt turn for the worse when the United States was brought into the war on 7 December 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The end of the War in 1945 brought the defeat of Nazism, Fascism and Japanese imperialism but also the rise of an expansionist and threatening Soviet totalitarianism. Fortunately, in spite of criticism at home, President Harry S. Truman recognized the importance of the strategic Triangle by enunciating the Truman Doctrine on 12 March 1947, which prevented Greece and Turkey from being victimized by totalitarian communism⁶⁰. Later, both Greece and Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and did not hesitate to send their forces to Korea to help stem the spread of Stalinist communism in Asia. Today, the peoples of Greece and Turkey are in the position to share in the fruits of the West's Cold War victory but only if they choose the course of peace. It is hoped that what has been offered here will help build a fulcrum for bringing an end to the costly tension between the two peoples⁶¹.

59. von Papen, p. 480.

60. Greece found herself fighting a bloody civil war sponsored by Moscow from 1944 to 1949. On 22 September 1946 the Soviet Union, in a note to the Turkish government, insisted on a Soviet role in the defense of the Dardanelles Straits.

61. This paper must end with the author thanking Professor Robin Higham for his help in preparing this paper for publication.

